

**DISCIPLINE, POWER, AND KNOWLEDGE**  
**AT THREE SCHOOLS IN THE EASTERN CAPE**

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by

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## **DECLARATION**

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**MARCH 2018**

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
ATCP	Alternatives to Corporal Punishment
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
IT	Information Technology
RCL	Representative Council of Learners
SMT	School Management Team
SABC	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SAIRR	South African Institute of Race Relations
SASA	South African Schools Act
SCO	Student Christian Organisation
SGB	School Governing Body
SWPBS	School-wide Positive Behaviour Support
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNO	United Nations Organisation

## ABSTRACT

Across teaching careers that span decades, teachers often witness on a daily basis the collapsing of traditional modes of discipline and the emergence of new power dynamics founded on human rights and freedoms. These experiences are ingrained in teacher's memories as practitioners in the teaching and learning terrain. This study was inspired by a desire to inquire and to uncover the complexities associated with discipline, knowledge and power. In that respect, the key idea that underpins the study is that school discipline is not about school ethos or what is expected to happen on the grounds of schools, but rather about the societal norms and values that hold sway for defined schools in specific areas at particular moments in their operations and which are used to hold learners accountable. As such, the study navigates discourses on discipline, power and knowledge in order to understand the underlying ideological motives for the kind of discipline practiced in three Eastern Cape schools. Different contexts are juxtaposed with power and knowledge with a view to answer questions related to the disciplinary tools teachers use to assert their dominance over learners.

With regard to discipline itself, however, most teachers conceded that the concept and practice of school discipline went further than the crafting of a specific set of rules - that it entailed far more than the mayopic expression of dos and don'ts of the school's code of conduct. There are broader and far more complex considerations of disciplinary practices in schools that needed to be explored. There is a void in the literature on school discipline which warrants a conceptual rethink of the basis of the very acts of discipline or forms of order in which they had previously been grounded.

These are some of the phenomena that this research project sought to examine. In that respect, the study specifically sought to illustrate the issues in relation to the lives of "real teachers and learners", and fieldwork therefore focused on teachers' views of discipline at three schools in the Eastern Cape. Notably, the study also sought to highlight teacher practices in the rural context of Butterworth in the Eastern Cape, and teacher motives in dispensing discipline. The main goal was to learn more about the disempowering patterns of thinking and behaviours that may be engendered in pupils through the workings of discipline, power, and knowledge.

The data revealed a range of discursive linguistic tools and techniques that teachers sought to use to constitute the habitual thought patterns of learners.

## OPSOMMING

Gedurende onderwysloopbane wat dikwels oor dekades strek, neem onderwysers op 'n daaglikse basis episodes van swak dissipline in onderwyser-leerder-verhoudinge waar. Hierdie episodes bly by onderwysers soos hulle sukkel om sin te maak van die ingewikkelde dilemmas verwant aan tugteloosheid. Hierdie studie is aangespoor deur sommige van hierdie soort gevalle en die intellektuele verwarring wat hulle veroorsaak, naamlik 'n begeerte om die konsep van skoordisipline beter te verstaan. In hierdie opsig is die sleutelidee wat hierdie studie rugsteun dat skoordisipline nie handel oor skooletos of wat verwag word om op skoolgronde aan te gaan nie, maar eerder oor gemeenskapsnorme en -waardes wat belangrik is vir sekere skole in spesifieke areas op bepaalde tye in hul handeling en wat gebruik word om leerders aanspreeklik te hou. As sulks sluit die fokus van hierdie studie in debatte rakende mag en kennis en die veelvuldige vlakke wat hulle bring na debatte rakende skoordisipline en die gesofistikeerde magdinamika van skool en samelewing in verskillende kontekste.

Die beginpunt van hierdie studie is die debatte rondom lyfstraf in Suid-Afrika en die verbanning daarvan ná 1994, wat baie onderwysers uit hul gemaksones geruk het en in 'n nuwe soort dissiplinêre omgewing forseer het. Die fokus is dus op die onsekerheid wat met hierdie verwikkeling gepaard gegaan het en wat dit vir onderwyspraktik beteken. Die verbanning van lyfstraf, wat baie as radikale hervorming beskou het, het gelei tot 'n vlak van onsekerheid wat die “reëls” verander het vir baie onderwysers en bygedra het tot reeds plofbare skoolomgewings waar skoolgemeenskappe worstel vir beheer oor wat hulle voorheen gehad het. Selfs ervare en veteraanonderwysers het gesukkel ná 1994 met situasies waarmee hulle nog nie vantevore te doene gekry het nie, asook met 'n nuwe stel reëls en regulasies wat hulle aanspreeklik hou. Waar vele onderwysers voorheen weggekom het met dade onder die dekmantel van wat hulle gedink het was professionele optrede, het die groter fokus op regte en verantwoordelikhede ná 1994 alle onderwysers in posisies geplaas waar hulle krities moes nadink oor hul vorige praktike en moet optree volgens nuwe stelle grondwetlike regulasies.

Onderwysers kon dus nie meer eensydig optree nie, aangesien hulle beide grondwetlik en wetlik gemonitor word, en ook baie meer nouliks deur skoolbeheerliggame getakseer word op hul daaglikse praktik. Deur nie net aanspreeklik te wees aan gesagsliggame nie, maar ook aan ouers en leerders (deur middel van skoolgedragskodes), het enorme druk geplaas op onderwysers se sin van professionele onafhanklikheid, en 'n era van deursigtigheid en dissiplinêre praktik ingelui wat onderwysers versigtig, senuweeagtig, en meer sensitief maak

rakende hoe hulle leerders behandel en leerders se regte respekteer. Willekeurige afdwinging van “straf” was ’n skok vir hul sin van professionele praktyk.

Wat dissipline betref, het die meeste onderwysers egter toegegee dat die konsep en praktyk van skoordissipline verder gegaan het as ’n spesifieke stel reëls, dat dit baie meer behels as die moets en moenies van verskillende onderwysomgewings, en dat daar langer-termyn implikasies was vir huidige dissiplinêre praktyke in skole wat aangespreek moes word. Die veranderinge in skoordissipline-praktyke het egter ook ’n behoefte geskep om konseptueel anders te dink oor die grondslag van die einste dade of vorme van dissipline en orde waarvan hulle vryelik gebruik gemaak het.

Hierdie is dus sommige van die fenomene wat hierdie navorsingsprojek gepoog het om te ondersoek. In hierdie opsig het hierdie studie spesifiek gepoog om die kwessies in verband met die lewens van “regte onderwysers en leerders” te illustreer, en veldwerk het dus gefokus op onderwysers se sieninge van dissipline by drie skole in die Oos-Kaap. Dié studie het ook gepoog om onderwyspraktyke in die plattelandse konteks van Butterworth in die Oos-Kaap, asook onderwysers se motiewe om dissipline af te dwing (op ’n skaal van teregwysing tot ’n begeerte om die leerder te slaan) in kontekste wat nie normaalweg ondersoek word nie, te beklemtoon. Die hoofdoel was om meer te leer rakende die ontmagtigende denk- en aksiepatrone wat voortgebring is in leerders deur die beoefening van onderwyserdissipline, -mag, en -kennis.

Die data het ’n reeks wydlopige taalkundige instrumente en tegnieke onthul wat onderwysers gebruik om die gebruikelike denkpatrone van leerders te vorm, met onderwysers wat leerders behandel as voorwerpe van beide betragting en beskuldiging, asook voorwerpe wat voortdurende toesig, monitering, en beheer benodig.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 THE RATIONALE OF THE STUDY**

Whether for novice teachers or teachers whose careers span decades, learner discipline is a fundamental and intrinsic component of everyday school practice and is deeply infused into every part of the teaching and learning enterprise. Research reveals that indiscipline amongst learners has not only risen considerably in the last 15 years, but often in ways that have brought substantial anxiety to bear on teachers' lives and teachers' everyday practices. The extent of this anxiety is that in post-1994 South Africa has witnessed a serious attrition of teachers through early retirement (Naong, 2007). Research reveals that learner indiscipline and the banning of corporal punishment are often cited as key reasons for teachers leaving the profession. Smit (2009) notes that the frustrations induced by learner indiscipline and the banning of corporal punishment also inform a sizeable number of current teachers considering leaving the teaching profession, with learner behaviour shown to play a huge role in how all teachers view teaching and their teaching environments and practices. Teachers arguably become demoralised by having to daily manage difficult learner behaviour, which they claim affects the quality of their practices and their investment in what they do. Paradoxically, this sense of helplessness has in many cases led to many teachers in a variety of schools returning to more physical and forceful manifestations of discipline, as noted in Govender and Sookrajh's (2014) research on corporal punishment in seven primary schools in KwaZulu-Natal.

This thesis seeks to understand how teachers in one small area make sense of discipline within their schools and how they experience the new disciplinary methodologies they have adopted since corporal punishment was banned after 1994. This research examines how discipline, knowledge, and power interface to establish and sustain orderly teaching and learning environments in their schools. The goal is to employ Foucault's hypothesis on power, namely "the social practices" that inform the "conduct of individuals" and to look for certain "social practices of domination" within them (cited in Markula-Denison & Pringle, 2006), in relation to what teachers do at three schools in the Eastern Cape.

As such, the study depicts the experiences of teachers and learners at three designated research sites in rural Eastern Cape as they engage in contestations over power in educational spaces, as viewed through their acts of discipline and indiscipline. The analysis of interviews reveal

complex intersections of discipline, power, and knowledge at the respective schools, as well as multifaceted motives for teachers pursuing the disciplinary regimes that they espouse within their classrooms.

The thesis argues that disciplinary rules of engagement between teachers and learners have assumed a different character since 1994 – with simple tasks (like getting a learner to clean the chalkboard) taking on substantially different meanings within the new disciplinary regimes. It claims that philosophical and empirical explanations of new school disciplinary environments can offer interesting connections to past practices and better understandings of intersections of power, knowledge, and punishment.

The study asserts that the goals of disciplinary practices are more than simply ‘fixing’ deviant learner behaviour, but also about ideologically destabilising and steering what it is that learners do, or think they do, and how they approach their worlds. *Teachers discipline learners because they seek power and control over their practices.*

The study cautions, however, that with the rapid change that presently engulfs different school realities, educational leaders, teachers, and learners need to move beyond the various boundaries that were previously set up. Simply put, they have to create different and better workable realities for themselves and their learners (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2006). The study offers some illustrations of disciplinary challenges that affect learners at the three post-apartheid schools, and suggests how engaging with these can help role players think about and move in different directions.

The title of the thesis, *Discipline, Power, and Knowledge*, far from being a linear narrative of the three concepts, suggests that the three concepts are interwoven into a three-dimensional sphere in the fabric of the different teaching and learning spaces at the three schools.

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

The discipline that daily challenges teachers and other role players in education (Heystek, 2006; Mohapi, 2014) is both complex and has multiple meanings.

In the first place, discipline has always been about control. It is about creating or maintaining order in schools and carries a number of negative meanings in the public imagination. In creating order, discipline uses practices of punishment, reward, and regulation that are meant to produce compliance and learner obedience. These involve the management not only of learner behaviour but also the knowledge that learners are given access to, and what they are

meant to absorb. In that respect, discipline has always been about constructing passivity (Freire, 1975). This kind of expected acceptance of the status quo should always be troubling.

Discipline is also about the extent to which individuals consider their actions and act in deliberate ways. Communities worry about whether learners have the ability and power to take command and master the resources available to them to organise and guide their living situations. Discipline is meant to be a positive act where individuals recognise that they have the power to recognise what they are about and to persist with achieving or accomplishing this (Dewey, 1916:129). This meaning of discipline emphasises the need for disciplined individuals that operate in rational and ordered ways, but that recognise their agency.

Discipline also refers to the knowledge about conduct within society and about how individuals conduct themselves in a world that attaches particular meanings to what is acceptable and what is not, and what needs to be known and what not. Foucault (1980:93) speaks about this knowledge base as “the production of discourses of truth through which power is exercised”. Disciplinary knowledge is about turning learners into subjects, where learners utilise different bodies of knowledge to make sense of the world and to make decisions. When teachers think about discipline, they presume that learners do not know what is expected of them. They think that it is their job to teach learners the knowledge base, practices, and theories that influence disorderly behaviours, and also expose them to knowledge about orderliness that learners must internalise and use to inform their actions.

A further understanding of discipline is about how ‘societies of control’ are developed. In the public imagination, discipline is always spoken about as how it affects others. The media help highlight how things will unravel if disciplinary power is not properly spread out beyond schools and beyond public institutions into all areas of daily life. Discipline is thus also about the different vocabularies of domination that have come from legal frameworks that are used to organise criminals, ideas about discipline, social responsibility, and how control is dispersed across general society – in ways that regulate learners as both public citizens and individuals who are part of school environments. Discipline is a form of control, but as Foucault (1979) and Deleuze (1992) observed, it operates below the radar and at a distance.

Discipline is also about ‘self-styling’, where teachers apply rules, regulations, strategies, tactics, and agreed-upon techniques to force learners to live according to particular kinds of behaviours and actions, and where learners take on these lessons and ‘self-style’ themselves according to what they desire or what they think is possible. As Parkes (2010) notes, while

learners sometimes willingly give themselves up to “subjection”, they know they can only attain a certain level of freedom in doing so. They know that their freedoms are limited by the constructs of the realities in which they live, and what is acceptable and what is not in those worlds.

In all the meanings noted above, for practising teachers in the classroom, discipline is aligned to different ways of ‘governing’ communities and learners and is about how forms of regulation are developed that give some learners more freedom (or more power) than others. Teachers are part of the process of giving or taking away power from learners. Teachers are part of the ways in which discipline shapes, punishes, represses, enables, constructs, reforms, and includes and excludes learners; they contribute to the discourses that create the multiple meanings that give different learners different viewpoints on life; and they help shape how learner futures are thought about at various times and in a variety of places.

For this study, school discipline was approached as an unstable and problem concept that contributes to many “dystopian situations” (Millei, Griffiths & Parkes, 2010) and causes both teachers and learners to struggle to make sense of what is expected of them in their different spaces. This is not helped when schools in certain spaces experience high levels of indiscipline or transgressions and cause the axis that ties together school discipline, power, and knowledge to shift and look differently in those spaces (as happened in many instances in South Africa after 1994).

With regard to South Africa, it is ironic that it was the new constitutional dispensation – which entrenched democratic values based on human dignity, the achievement of equality, and the advancement of human rights and freedoms – that caused the most alarm amongst schoolteachers after 1994. That was mainly because it outlawed the use of corporal punishment that had been used until then to correct and regulate learner behaviour in schools. In that respect, developments attached to the granting of new freedoms created a whole new terrain for teachers. Many teachers were previously accustomed to, and often accepting of, the practice of corporal punishment, and within the new terrain they had to suddenly experiment after 1994 with different conceptual and practical tools to enforce discipline in their classrooms. For this, many called on tools and techniques that were connected to the disciplinary apparatus of the state and that they as teachers could now legally use to correct learner behaviour and thereby establish learning environments that were conducive to all.

Keeping this in mind, the starting premise of this study is that schooling is more than a social platform through which supposedly ideologically neutral knowledge is conveyed. Rather, the study presumes that schooling is an ideologically laden arena in which different subjects with different dispositions come into tension and attempt to construct and monitor consensual ways of organising their worlds (Walsh, 2007:92; Cochran-Smith & Demers, 2008:275). On this platform, as much as some teachers may fundamentally rethink their disciplinary stances, there are also others that tenaciously hold onto older (pre-1994) mindsets and refuse to endorse solutions inspired by democratic ideals (Naong, 2007).

This paradox within school operations and classroom discipline was vividly brought to the fore in the period after 1994 through television series such as *Yizo-Yizo* (SABC), where the stark realities of the post-apartheid classroom opened up a national conversation about the state of schooling and the behavioural challenges that came with a newly democratic South Africa (Maluleka, 2009:82). It also highlighted a surprising lack of national consensus on how the question of school discipline could be resolved (Cicognani, 2004; John, 2012). More than anything, *Yizo-Yizo* reminded everyone that schooling and its disciplinary practices both produced and reproduced social challenges and dilemmas for different communities. This was later reinforced by research conducted by Ncontsa (2013) in four South African high schools regarding the state of discipline and lawlessness in township schools.

It is these dilemmas and ideas that provided the backdrop for the current study. The stimulus for this study was the *contradictory* responses of many progressive and distinguished teachers and colleagues (along with those of the more traditional type) to the issue of classroom discipline, and to instruments like corporal punishment after 1994.

With respect to the above, the different paradoxes that have emerged within schools need to be understood in relation to the push for democracy and egalitarianism within South Africa since 1994. On the one hand, the push involved moving beyond the political domain into local spaces like schools and challenging issues of authority and control, and previous ways of doing things, within these settings. This led to the banning of instruments like corporal punishment after 1994.

On the other hand, amidst the constant fear of risk and disorder in South Africa since 1994, and the desperate need for ‘some kind of normal order’, what has emerged with some stakeholders voicing a ‘longing for corporal punishment’, is a societal desire for ‘theatrical displays’ of ‘performed discipline’ where the power exerted by different communities or institutions is

(being asked to be) made much more visible, tangible, effective, and accountable for all role players. In that regard, while some may still call for a return to corporal punishment, most others yearn for some kind of similar or new (visible) sanction that displays firm authority and control.

Spierenburg (1984:viii) refers to this as the desire for a spectacle of suffering, where the *spectacle* is meshed within elements of *repression* in order to keep different school populations in line. As such, discipline is expected to operate both as sets of conventions, procedures, and policies of control, as well as constantly being enacted as a spectacle in order for it (discipline) to be produced, reproduced, and revered in modern society. It is through the ‘spectacle’, according to Spierenburg (1984), that learners and educators are drawn into participatory relationships with discipline that powerfully develops shared – often opposing – meanings of what they experience in common spaces. As Foucault (1977:137) notes, it is through discipline that dominant ways of doing things in schools are codified into the temporal and spatial locales of schools, and the movements of those who inhabit such schools.

### **1.3 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH**

This study was conceived with a view to achieve a general aim, as well as more focused, specific aims.

#### **1.3.1 General aim**

The general aim of the study was to analyse and critique school discipline as it interfaced with power and knowledge at the local school level in a rural district of an impoverished South African province. The study aimed to focus on three schools in the Eastern Cape, with the view that understanding how school discipline is contemplated and practised in a rural context can offer a distinctive insight into the issue of school discipline, especially when placed against the larger backdrop of a broader South African literature and writings about discipline within international literature.

#### **1.3.2 Specific aims**

The study aimed to achieve the following specific aims, namely to:

- Identify different teacher understandings of their roles in enforcing school codes of conduct, and engaging with them about the particular interests served by these codes.
- Understand teachers’ perceptions of power in relation to their teaching strategies.



- Uncover the strategies that teachers use to manage disruptive behaviour and relate this back to their own disciplinary ideals.

#### 1.4 DELIMITING THE SCOPE OF THE PROJECT

From the outset, the study acknowledged that school discipline was practised according to different contexts and situations. It sought to unpack at the philosophical level some of the contradictions in the manner in which discipline has been practised in three different rural schools, and how power and knowledge functioned to inform these disciplinary practices. By looking at practices at three schools in the Eastern Cape that, although similar in many important respects, exhibited shades of difference in terms of the character of discipline that was practised in each school, the study aimed to point to ways of thinking that emerged from that district tied to their specific contexts.

On the other hand, the study aimed to *empirically* examine some of the teacher-pupil relations in the three schools to understand different discursive standpoints towards discipline. The study sought to bring into view standpoints that are not always visible to others. Thus, two of the schools, Zamokuhle High School and Nkululeko High School, are from a small peri-urban town called Butterworth. The third school, Sakhisizwe High School, located in a village called Mimosa, is about five kilometres from Butterworth and situated in a rural setting under the jurisdiction of a chief. The value of the latter school is that it draws its disciplinary character mainly from indigenous customs and traditions.

While the study has a very limited focus, it also wants to show how at certain times, with regard to certain concepts, the rural and the urban become conflated. There is supposedly an urban-rural divide that causes communities to operate differently in rural and urban spaces. However, because of the proximity of the urban to the rural (between Mimosa village and the urban dwellers of Duduza Municipality, in this case) and the ‘constant connection’ to and ‘visibility of the global’ in what public schools do, approaches to discipline in the Butterworth district inevitably transcend rural-urban divides.

The point of departure for this study is the interrogation of debates about corporal punishment in South Africa and its banning after 1994. This shook many teachers out of their comfort zones and thrust them into a different type of disciplinary wilderness. The focus is on the uncertainty that accompanied this development and the need for an indepth interrogation of the power void left as a result of the banning of corporal punishment. What many regarded as a radical reform,

the banning of corporal punishment brought a level of uncertainty which changed the “rules of the game” for teachers and complicated an already volatile schooling environment. School communities are scrambling for control over what they previously held.

The disciplinary epoch ushered in by the South African Schools Act is a novelty even to veteran teachers who find themselves reverting back to outmoded practices. Current regulations hold them accountable to due processes. Where many teachers previously got away with acts within the guise of what they thought was professional conduct, the greater focus on rights and responsibilities after 1994 placed all teachers in positions where they needed to critically reflect on previous practices and act according to new values and constitutional imperatives.

Essentially, teachers could no longer act unilaterally as they were both monitored constitutionally and legally, but also appraised more closely in their everyday practice by school governing bodies (SGBs). Being responsible to the authorities but also to parents and learners (through agreed-upon school codes of conduct) placed enormous pressure on teachers’ sense of professional autonomy, and ushered in an era of transparency and disciplinary practice that made teachers cautious, anxious, and more sensitive to how they handled learners and how they respected their rights. Arbitrary imposition of “punishment” became a thing of the past with the ushering-in of a democratic dispensation.

## 1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study sought to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

*Research question:* How do issues of discipline, power, and knowledge intersect to inform the ways in which teachers in one rural district approach, control, and guide their learners?

*Sub-questions:*

- 1) How do teachers describe school discipline?
- 2) What are teachers’ views on the influence of human rights culture on power relations between teachers and learners, and between learners and their peers?
- 3) How are teachers coping with new disciplinary codes of conduct that are grounded in constitutional values?
- 4) What techniques do teachers use to negotiate issues of power and knowledge in their various teaching and learning spaces, and in disciplining their learners?

## 1.6 CHAPTER OVERVIEW

Chapter 1 has sought to briefly introduce the reader to the rationale of the study and to the key ideas that prompted the study. It outlined the problem statement and the aims of the research, and concluded with posing a number of research aims and questions. It also included a synopsis of the various chapters (below) that constitute the thesis.

Chapter 2 explains the research design and methodology that was used in the study and highlights the centrality of the literature review in this study. It is argued that the literature review in this study, more than anything else, is central to the narrative of the three schools and how their experiences of discipline are captured. It is crucial to understand the complex integration of discipline, knowledge, and power within schools in South Africa, and to see the links between them. This chapter puts into perspective the methodological peculiarities of a postmodern research paradigm, from which this study draws inspiration. Finally, the chapter discusses the limitations of the study and describes which steps were taken to counteract some of these limitations.

Chapter 3 briefly outlines the conceptual framework of the thesis. It discusses the analytical orientation of the research, outlining the concepts of discipline, power, knowledge, and ideology that together situate debates on school discipline in the three schools in the Eastern Cape.

Chapter 4 engages with existing bodies of literature, and asks: Why has discipline been a problem in all communities at all times? It also discusses which remedies previous research findings have developed for ‘problematic’ discipline.

Chapter 5 presents the research data in the form of a narrative of the interviews that were conducted at Sakhisizwe Senior Secondary School, Zamokuhle Junior Secondary School, and Nkululeko Senior Secondary School in the Eastern Cape. This chapter also presents a preliminary analysis of the data. This means that the data transcription is interspersed with tentative data analysis.

The analysis of fieldnotes led to the conclusion that the disciplinary stances of teachers were conditioned by pre-1994 schooling histories. It highlights the manner in which teachers are struggling to embrace the key disciplinary ideas of the new constitutional order. More importantly, the chapter attempts to provide an understanding of how teachers conceptualise the term “discipline” and how this blends in with different strands of theories on power and discipline.

Chapter 6 provides a more detailed analysis of the data. Meanings are extracted from the fieldnote transcripts to weave together some thick descriptions of informants' responses. At some point, the analysis is focused on the individual, often quoting verbatim what informants had said (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). In other instances, key issues emerging from the data are amalgamated to present the emergence of different themes. This chapter crystallises the main themes that emanate from the literature review and provides insights gained from the research findings. Although the findings may not be generalisable to a broader population, there are certain themes that show convergence between theoretical constructs gleaned from the literature and the empirical research grounded in practical school realities.

The thesis concludes in Chapter 7 with some quick overviews of what has been uncovered and presented across the various chapters. The main contribution of the thesis lies in its search for nuanced meanings of discipline. This is necessary, it is argued, for discipline to be meaningful and to assist in the functioning of schools.

Brendtro and Du Toit (2005:31) regard discipline as “rule-breaking that are practice runs at independence”, where contests ensue between “adults that seek control” and “learners that seek autonomy”. The study asserts that ensuing power struggles within schools are what need to be understood if the meaning and importance of discipline in schools are to be recognised. This may help teachers think differently and less nostalgically about the demise of corporal punishment as a form of punishment and control.

## CHAPTER 2

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the method followed in the planning and execution of this research project. This was a qualitative study that drew substantially from notions of power espoused within a Foucauldian discourse analysis. The study utilised convenience sampling to gather data about the different kinds of power dynamics (including linguistic) within three schools in the Eastern Cape, and their relation to issues of discipline.

It is notable that power is a contested concept (Pallaver, 2011), with numerous studies conducted on its manifestations in various arenas. Selecting a methodology was thus both a conceptual and methodological challenge. The easiest route normally is to opt for conventional paradigms with clearly defined methodological rules. For this study, however, it was decided to juxtapose empirical and theoretical perspectives, and break rank with the grand narratives of the main meta-theories. The goal was to present an alternative version of some social realities. Lin (1998:163) provides an account of how a generic perspective is viewed by sceptics:

“These differences in the use and conclusions of interpretive and positivist work have led purists to assert that these two systems of inference cannot be combined.”

As such, the study sought to analyse normative data not only to inform but also to theorise about the interface between power, education, and knowledge in the three schools in the chosen rural context.

#### 2.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is a method of inquiry that seeks to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen *et al.*, 2007: 21). It generates qualitative data in the form of words, text, feelings, and motivations. This research approach can elicit thick descriptions relating to personality, dynamics, and motivations (Kothari, 2004). In that regard, qualitative research is not merely looking at people’s behaviours based on guesswork, but rather a rigorous exploration of the meanings people attach to their experiences. Qualitative research is not

abstract theorising, but its conclusions are rooted in the researcher's ability to ascertain the intentions of actors to share their experiences (Cohen *et al.*, 2007).

This qualitative study seeks to provide philosophical argumentation, but also draws on empirical evidence gathered from within three schools in the Eastern Cape. The synthesis of the two approaches – i.e. theoretical argumentation and the analysis of empirical evidence – attempts to generate theoretical suggestions that are grounded in practical realities.

The drive towards blending empirical research with theoretical deductions is an attempt to create a philosophical perspective “that is adapted to the project of empirical social science” (Agger, 1991). It was felt that the three-dimensional nature of the research focus of this study – namely discipline, power, and knowledge – introduced complexities that would be better resolved by using a varied approach. It would also accommodate research on power, the reading of which was inevitably tainted by the ideological convictions of the researcher.

Understandably, the kind of methodology that was needed to analyse power had to recognise that messages (that carry data) are communicated by teachers “quietly, insidiously, relentlessly and effectively through the structure of the classroom” (Postman & Weingartner, 2009:23). Thus the meanings made by participants in particular contexts had to always be understood to be non-generalisable and context bound.

Another approach in the thesis was that through their multiple positionalities teachers are contextualised as members of society, and as employees of the state under a particular government with its own political ethos. This complexity required the researcher to be sensitive to the expressions of teachers in such contexts, and recognise that this might deter teachers from expressing their assumptions, thoughts, beliefs, and understandings in unrestrained ways (Zwiers & Morrisette, 1999:130).

Although the researcher canvassed the explanations of participants, attention had to be paid to not uncritically trusting teacher expressions as full explanations of lived experiences. The researcher was therefore very cautious in collecting the explanations and interpretations that actors provided in interviews, and critiqued these alongside the statements of participants themselves and those of their peers. In this way, the reliability of this study, it was felt, would not be compromised. The researcher used an approach that involved the blending of research methodologies in order to illuminate the research phenomenon from different perspectives. The data were analysed using the theoretical lenses of control theory (Hirschi, 1969), along with a Foucauldian discourse analysis. It is argued that the philosophical analysis, coupled with the

empirical overview of the teachers' daily practices, offered a window through which some of the intricacies of the power dynamics of the schools could be explored. The study drew extensively on Foucault's theory on power to explain the researcher's philosophical viewpoint concerning the politics of discipline. This is discussed below.

### **2.2.1 Foucauldian discourse analysis**

Graham (2005) notes that Foucault refused to be pinned down to any kind of methodological purism and as such suggested ways of conducting research without being prescriptive. Foucault (1977) was always keen not to follow a linear progression from one historical epoch to the next, and to focus on the contextual basis for 'truth making' in different situations. He argued that what held for one generation may not necessarily hold for future generations.

Notions of discipline form part of Foucault's work on power and domination, and his focus on the concept of the Panopticon was central to the ways he explained how "the exercise of power at the lowest possible cost" was secured (Rabinow, 1984:207). Foucault argued that the efficiency of disciplinary systems lay in their ability to submit individual bodies to the codes of certain spaces – such that they become self-regulating. Such codes were meant to reproduce order without needing to exercise "external power" (Rabinow, 1984).

### **2.2.2 The Panopticon view**

The Panopticon is an architectural design that allows for maximum surveillance of individuals in institutions and prisons (Foucault, 1977). This surveillance functions through the mechanism of a central guard tower with a view to see every individual cell or unit, prisoner, and warden. While the guards can see individuals in prisons, the prisoners themselves cannot know that they are being observed at any moment (Rabinow, 1984:218). In a school setup, this concept plays out in how learners are regulated and monitored by the disciplinary apparatuses (and codes of conduct) of schools without the learners actually knowing that they are being 'watched' and 'followed'. The panopticon is a viewpoint that uses the schools' technologies of power to subdue and dominate learners, and to sensitise them to their institutional obligations. It is also what provides the 'undetectable' link between disciplinary systems in schools to that of more restrictive institutions like prisons. The value of the panopticon is to create within learners' psyche the perpetual idea that by 'transgressing school rules', they would come under the watchful eye of school management. It is what Foucault (1977:137) characterised as "an infinitesimal power over the active body", where observed subjects may operate 'freely' but at

all times uneasily ‘feel’ some form of shadowing of their every move in the background. In this way, subjects are sometimes consciously, sometimes subconsciously, aware of the gaze of the figure of authority. Foucault (1977) argued that once the panoptic effect overwhelmed individuals, it was no longer necessary for teachers, for example, to continuously force learners to conform to the disciplinary structures of different schools. It was also no longer necessary to use force to subdue learners. To illustrate the panoptic effect, Foucault (1977:137) wrote:

“An uninterrupted, constant coercion, supervising the processes of the activity rather than its result and it is exercised according to a codification that partitions as closely as possible time, space, movement.”

Foucauldian discourse analysis does not approach the concept of knowledge at face value. Rather, it tries to probe deeper to demystify the social phenomena that make up how the world is viewed and understood. In other words, Foucauldian discourse analysis assumes that the scientific procedure alone is not the only benchmark to capture or check the validity of truth claims.

As such, the Foucauldian approach recognises that the discursive spaces around which knowledge is generated have profound influences on what is considered acceptable and what is regarded as taboo. In this regard, Tamboukou (1999) observes that Foucault was sceptical of universalistic dogmas of ‘truth’, ‘objectivity’, and ‘pure scientific reason’ and would not accept that understandings of the world need only explore how ‘rules’, ‘principles’, and ‘structures’ came together to inform life. This thesis adopts a similar stance, namely that by analysing discipline, power, and knowledge in a particular context, multiple meanings would emerge that could offer more meaningful understandings of how teachers and learners relate to and engage with each other in rural classrooms.

### **2.3 SAMPLING STRATEGY**

After careful surveillance of the situations in the three different schools, the researcher opted for convenience sampling. According to Cohen *et al.* (2007), convenience sampling involves choosing the nearest potential participants who happen to be available and accessible at the time to be interviewed and included in study.



Convenience sampling suited the purposes of this research for the following reasons:

- There was no intention to generalise the findings beyond the research context around which the study was delineated.
- The challenging circumstances found in two of the three schools served as a caution to the researcher to take a somewhat less restraining arrangement when choosing the sample. Volunteers were thus accepted as they made themselves available. Two out of the three principals of the schools under focus were particularly firm about not being interviewed for the study.

Two of the schools, Zamokuhle Junior Secondary School and Nkululeko High School, are from a small rural/peri-urban town called Butterworth. The third school, Sakhisizwe Junior Secondary School, located in a village called Mimosa, is about five kilometres from Butterworth and situated in a much more rural setting under the jurisdiction of a chief. The value of the latter school is that it draws its disciplinary character mainly from indigenous customs and traditions. As such there were two kinds of divides that shaped teacher responses. The first is the divide within the rural setting of Butterworth between the peri-urban town and the surrounding villages. The second is the divide between the rural space of Butterworth and the urban spaces of other peri-urban towns or cities in the region (like Umtata and East London). There is supposedly an urban-rural divide that causes communities to operate differently in rural and urban spaces. However, because of the proximity of the urban to the rural (between Mimosa village and the peri-urban town dwellers of Butterworth Municipality, and other more urbanised towns) and the ‘constant connection’ to and ‘visibility of the global’ in what all public South African schools do, approaches to discipline in the Butterworth district must be seen to often transcend rural-urban divides.

## 2.4 INTERVIEWS

The interview strategy was two-pronged. Group sessions were found to yield superficial responses and provided narrative-thin data. Also, given the time constraints imposed by the school management and the tight schedule that the researcher had to follow, group interviews, rather than one-on-one interviews, were much more economical in terms of time (MacMillan & Schumacher, cited in Tungata, 2006). As a result, the individual interviews at first were almost an afterthought.

When the group interview data were revisited and assessed for reliability, it was found, however, that individual interviews were necessary. A purposive sample was thus drawn from the groups that had been interviewed. According to Schutt (2012:157), purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method that targets individuals who are particularly knowledgeable about issues under investigation. For this study, the generalised findings of group interviews served as a useful backdrop against which to probe, verify, and challenge individual perspectives through this sampling method.

The interviews explored participants' experiences with school discipline, their perceptions of power as related to school discipline, what knowledge they gained from those experiences, and what realities confronted them in the space in which they operated as teachers. This included reflections on their attitudes towards the banning of corporal punishment in South African schools.

Twelve teachers were interviewed for the study; four teachers in each school. They were initially brought together at their different schools as three focus groups of four participants each. However, when this did not lead to very fruitful data (probably due to the sensitivity of the topic of discipline), each teacher was interviewed separately.

## **2.5 LITERATURE REVIEW AS A RESEARCH METHOD**

The literature review forms an integral part of the methodology of this thesis. It is the basis upon which a coherent thesis on discipline, power, and knowledge in the three schools was created.

For data gathering, the study made abundant use of secondary sources in the form of published research articles, commentaries on interviews of prominent scholars, books, national archives, online sources, unpublished theses, and SABC archival television material. Primary data were also obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted in three schools that were located in a former homeland<sup>1</sup> in the Eastern Cape.

According to Rivenburgh (2009), a good literature review with a solid synthesis of prior research that elicits themes that enrich understandings of particular topics has huge value in generating data when placed alongside group and individual interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> Beinart and Bundy (1987) note that under the apartheid regime, the "homeland" system designated (mostly rural) land to black South Africans based on region and 'tribal' affiliation. These homelands were invariably economically depressed and impoverished, with many homes relying on remittances from migrant workers who worked in bigger towns and cities.

A cross-disciplinary review of existing literature was undertaken in order to situate discipline, power, and knowledge in their relationships to the context. It was found that the ways in which school discipline is conceptualised within the literature was not that much different from that of the criminal justice system, and that many assumptions about schools and school discipline came from within the criminal justice system. Themes emerged that suggested that insights from educational psychology, sociology, and criminology could shed light on the research problem. In this sense, the literature offered key contributions from these disciplines to the conceptualisation of the study, but this was not exhaustive. The literature review also offered insights into different schools of thought, such as modernism and postmodernism, and highlighted a range of theorists and their contributions to how the intersection of discipline, power, and knowledge could be researched and understood.

## **2.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

### **2.6.1 The linguistic barrier**

The participants were interviewed in English and given the option to respond either in English or in their mother tongue, or a mixture of both. The rationale behind the mixing of English and isiXhosa was to exploit the natural propensity of participants to mix the two languages in their casual conversations. This, however, posed challenges of interpretation because the thesis is written in English and there is no perfect symmetry between English and isiXhosa. Although it can reasonably be expected that competence in English is an integral part of the credentials of all teachers, the conceptual baggage inherent in the vernacular language did hinder the eloquence of teachers in English. Research has shown that bilingual people's views of the world assume a different hue depending on which language they use to express themselves (Boroditsky, 2011). For a balanced interpretation of ethnographic fieldnotes, a heightened level of reflexivity was very important. In some instances, the meanings of sentences were extrapolated from the researcher's familiarity with the slang or regional dialect of the participants.

### **2.6.2 Problems pertaining to access and gatekeepers**

Challenges to the research were encountered in the initial process of gaining access to research sites, and in establishing familiarity with members of the school community. A threat to validity was posed by negative relationships with staff members; arguably the quality of the data is influenced by the interpersonal dynamics between and among researchers and

participants. The researcher consciously canvassed the involvement of participants in the logistics of the research and in the execution of research tasks (like camera operations and other incidental chores). The rapport that accrued to the researcher from constructive engagement with participants enhanced validity by establishing relationships of trust and mutual respect, which affected the quality of the participants' responses (Coombs & Smith, 2003).

### 2.6.3 Narrative-thin data

It was apparent when answering deeply intrusive questions that participants tended to answer in second-person narratives with little personal detail. To generate first-person narratives, it thus became necessary to create environments where they could share helpful and meaningful narratives, especially for when data was later pieced together to capture the nuances of hypothetical, speculative, and spontaneous responses based on personal experience. It is notable that cultural mores affecting the willingness to share information with strangers will always influence the quality of data that can be obtained.

### 2.6.4 Historical baggage

A particular political phenomenon exists in these communities as a result of South Africa's apartheid history. In the heyday of apartheid within African communities, the practice of sharing knowledge or giving information was associated with providing authorities with evidence of certain transgressions and as such it risked being branded as collaboration or being an 'informant'. These labels were life threatening for those that dared volunteer information to strangers. It is a worldview and perspective that continue to inform the scepticism of research participants when providing detailed information about what they did, what they thought, and how they engaged in their lives within schools.

Alluding to the perceived threat, Nomiso, the deputy principal of Zamokuhle Junior Secondary School, when addressing her colleagues before the interview session, said:

*"I am apprehensive of being scrutinised. I want you to shed more clarity on the implications of my participation in this research. What is this?"*

This made it particularly necessary to establish relationships of trust within the schools, and to assure teachers that their participation would not result in the kinds of reprisals that they feared.

### 2.6.5 Methodological problems

There are methodological problems that are peculiar to research on power. Davis and Go (2009) note that there has been declining research output on power, which they attribute to methodological problems that “hinder power-structure research”.

The original plan was to establish focus groups and use these spaces to generate rich data for discourse analysis. It was felt that when participants discussed research problems in casual settings, the nuances of their conversations would provide for more generative analysis. The choice of focus groups was also motivated by their suitability for generating data not only through the spoken word but also from the holistic observation of body language and how meaning was made in such instances. The goal was to position the researcher unobtrusively on the fringes of the group as a detached observer.

From the onset of the research, however, it became apparent that the participants were not accustomed to the focus group interview method. Bloor *et al.* (2001:21) caution researchers to anticipate group dynamics that do not accord very well with focus group protocol:

“If they are not familiar with focus groups, they may expect to be asked questions, and they should direct answers to the facilitator.”

In the group interviews in the study, the protocols developed for the focus group interviews had to be abandoned when informants became predisposed towards a question-and-answer approach. They expected the researcher, as the facilitator, to play a pivotal role in steering the process. Once this was identified, the researcher had to abandon only using the focus group idea and had to include the interview format. The latter format was more natural for informants. For convenience and due to time constraints, participants were brought together for group interview sessions but this was then followed by individual interviews with persons who agreed to be interviewed after the group sessions. Only one principal was available for a one-on-one interview session.

### 2.6.6 Honesty

It is particularly interesting that the minute the issue of discipline is raised amongst teachers that they become immediately suspicious and adopt stances that position the researcher as an outsider and stranger to their contexts. In many cases teachers muffled their responses, as they believed that the research was actually a ruse to gather incriminating evidence on corporal

punishment in their schools. Wasef (2011:1), in his research on corporal punishment in schools, anticipated deceitful responses and to offset this, made a case against formal written consent:

“Those who would agree to participate with formal written consent were potentially more likely to lie and adjust their answers in a way that reflects what should be done according to the policy statement rather than what actually happens in reality.”

## **2.7 CONCLUSION**

This chapter explained the researcher's standpoint as far as the research methodology is concerned. It pointed out the methodological dilemmas that were peculiar to research on power, and to this study. The chapter highlighted how the interpretive paradigm, coupled with a touch of positivistic reality-check that empirical data could provide, generated a balanced view of the power struggles festering in the three Eastern Cape Schools. The sampling strategy was explained and, finally, limitations of the research were identified.

Notably, the research methodology chapter is provided at the beginning of the study because the literature review and the conceptual frameworks that are explored are regarded as key parts of the findings and the analysis thereof. As such, the next chapter delineates the conceptual framework through which this study is articulated, and is followed by the literature review.

## CHAPTER 3

### MAPPING OUT THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Alongside the research methodology that is used to operationalise the research in this study, and as discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter describes the main conceptual framework and concepts that are later used to frame and analyse the data.

For the study, the conceptual framework comprises of a chosen network of ideas and concepts that are used to generate some key theories and viewpoints about discipline (Jabareen, 2009), and to show some the underlying linkages to notions of punishment and ordering. These are tied to the study's research questions, which seek answers to how teachers think about, and apply, certain disciplinary concepts and techniques in their schools to overcome the various disciplinary challenges that they confront in their classrooms.

Discipline, power, knowledge, ideology, and discourse analysis form the building blocks of the thesis, with power as the common thread that links together all the concepts. Each concept is discussed below.

#### 3.2 DISCIPLINE

Discipline is an elusive concept because, according to Hall *et al.* (2013:29), it means different things to different people, and is open to both empirical and philosophical interpretation. The common view is that, whether regarded as a positive or negative concept, discipline invariably contributes to the learning project and in ways that warrant the application of certain actions to establish and protect empowering environments in schools. Rabinow (194:212) describes discipline as those “methods of training that enable individuals to become integrated into the more general demands of society”.

But it is also more than that. Millei *et al.* (2010) note that the concept of discipline in most societies is used to construct a shifting set of power relations in a variety of spaces, and that based on particular understandings of power and the dominant disciplinary discourses in those spaces, these power relations constantly position and reposition individuals in relation to each other, and are used to define what is thought to be ‘good’ or ‘bad’ people. This view of

discipline includes the presence of a set of techniques that are applied to groups of people in ways that are meant to condition them to self-regulate their own conduct.

Millei *et al.* (2010: 24) call for a view of discipline that does not foolishly advocate for equal relationships in places like schools, but that understands the concept to lay in the interstices of freedom and control, and within the interstices of autonomy and repression in classrooms, and that such a position provides insight into both the social relations that these produce and the disruptive encounters that led to the application of discipline in the first place.

Indeed, the large body of literature on discipline – especially that which examines the effectiveness of various intervention strategies to resolve disciplinary problems – usually overlooks manifestations of power as suggested above, or their pervasiveness within intervention strategies. Instead, much of the literature regards discipline as an essential prerequisite for the accomplishment of satisfactory learning outcomes in schools, and according to Adler, that sets out to mainly help individuals reconnect them to their own subjective spaces in their different worlds (cited in Aslina, Rasheed & Simpson, 2011). Many associate corporal punishment as having played a key role within these reconnection processes in the past.

Coming from a Foucauldian conceptualisation of discipline, there are no prescribed ways of disciplining learners, nor are there required correct or incorrect disciplinary approaches that bring ‘order’. Foucault (1977) observes that it is the modalities of judgement making that discount the legitimate interests of disempowered groups (like learners), and that this is done through the assertion of particular, dominant, ways of viewing and understanding the world.

### **3.3 POWER**

Power is the ability to make people do things that they may not have done otherwise (Sadan, 2004:36). Foucault (1977) argues that power is multifarious in that it has the capacity to be simultaneously productive, repressive, or destructive, and that for power to assert itself, it cannot be solely repressive and need to access a whole “productive network that runs through the whole social body” (Rabinow, 1984:61).

This study does not attempt to provide a rigorous definition of the kind of power that governs human relations broadly, or learner-teacher interactions in particular. Rather, following Foucault (1977), it is loosely suggested that power is able to assume different roles within schools depending on situations at hand. And that, for it (power) to operate optimally in schools



and to avoid being constantly resisted, power must be understood as firmly integrated within the everyday symbolic and material realities of schools, and their attached communities (Rabinow, 1984).

For Foucault (1977:177), systems of power and regulation imposed upon populations lie at the heart of all disciplinary systems, with public institutions like schools playing key roles in modern techniques of control. Schools play powerful instrumental and utilitarian functions within disciplinary systems by socially constructing teachers and learners within hierarchies of domination. Discipline at schools, according to Foucault (1977:137), makes possible “the meticulous control of the operations of the body and assures the constant subjection of its forces”. Its goal is to increase the maximum usefulness of the body and to decrease resistance to the demand for obedience. This is achieved by the supervision of every aspect of school institutional experiences through techniques of comparison, differentiation, homogenisation, exclusion, and the reinforcement of hierarchy. Foucault (1977:183) refers to this process as “normalisation”.

Normalisation (as a form of power) includes standards that are required for proper conduct, as well as suggested ‘corrections’ for deviations from the norm. In that respect, the function of discipline is to be corrective and to reduce gaps when learners depart from what is “measured up to be the norm”, with non-conforming behaviour of any kind invariably regarded as punishable (Foucault, 1977:179). As such, discipline is not about disciplining individuals per se, or asserting power over them, but also about espousing power through the proclamation of particular rituals of truth meant to produce obedient subjects who are rational, efficient, and that live strictly according to what modern society defines as human.

This process of discipline and power in schools is ensured by organising the bodies of learners in constant relation to the spaces that they inhabit, and the roles that they are expected to play. It is also ensured through the control of time (the timetable), the knowledge that learners are given access to (the curriculum or syllabus), and the relations and interactions between teachers and learners. Schools, as such, are parts of a single “carceral network” that serves to instruct and produce learners in ways that make them “docile subjects”, and, most importantly, without them realising what is happening (Foucault, 1977:305; 200). Foucault (1977:32) notes that it is through normalisation and surveillance that *discipline* becomes a visible but anonymous power within the school, by distributing authority in largely unobtrusive, unidentified, and unspecified ways.

Power thus lays not only in the hands of the state or its officials, but also in the hands of teachers and other professional role players in schools. And order is established through the application of power, coercion, and subjection within the school and its structures, with teachers as “the masters of discipline” but also the functionaries of surveillance (Foucault, 1977:138; 166). Power allows people to both be responsible for creating the worlds in which they (as different role players) operate, but hold them and their operations to the ways in which they understand and think about that world. Power is both a productive and a constraining force.

### 3.4 IDEOLOGY

Foucault (1977) regards ideology as oppositional to truth making (Rabinow, 1984:60). Rather, ideology encompasses sets of beliefs that inform how groups and their members understand their worlds (Van Dijk, 1998). It operates according to discourses that groups use to build a platform for the development and reproduction of particular ways of understanding. Within the school setting, different pressure groups compete for dominance of the school and thus develop competing ideological positions (with competing sets of beliefs) in order to justify their positioning within the school.

Within competing ideological positions, members of different groups tend to acquiesce and constantly affirm the lines of reasoning provided by their respective colleagues. Invariably, they do not express dissenting views that may alienate or undermine what their colleagues say. Van Dijk (1998) describes this situation as one where ideologies become the “abstract, axiomatic oasis for the socially shared belief systems of groups”.

Thus, even where colleagues disagree on other matters, particular views, values, and position take on added significance when a particular ideological stance is threatened. By not disagreeing in public with colleagues who share their values and positions, the common practices of members of different groups (ideology) are able to hold sway. This is the power of ideology, and the power of dominant sets of ideas and positions.

In this regard, institutions like schools, by necessity, regularly campaign for their self-preservation by using *ideology* as the key instrument by which to propagate the common values attached to their school communities, and in so doing also creating and reinforcing defined identities for their schools (Van Dijk, 1998:2).

### 3.5 DISCOURSE

The term *discourse* depicts a form of conversation across different modalities and within the contexts of different communications, while discourse analysis explores the power relationships between the different modalities and forms of communication as expressed through language, expressions, and practices (Gergen, 1985:2). Discourse is what constrains or enables writing, speaking, or thinking, and what *produces* the objects of what is spoken. Discourse analysis entails understanding the rules and structures that constitute a discourse.

The strand of discourse analysis articulated in this study is premised on the tenets of social constructionism, which is essentially an umbrella term for a range of new theories about culture and society. Each of the tenets of social constructionism include the following four premises (cited in Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:5), namely:

- 1) Social reality is neither objective nor absolute, and claims of ‘truth’ are always contextual and socially constituted.
- 2) Different views of the world and knowledge about it are themselves products of historically situated exchanges between people;
- 3) Social processes create and maintain the ways in which the world is understood, and knowledge itself emerges from social interaction – a process which leads to common truths and informs what is deemed to be true and false; and
- 4) The ways in which the world is understood lead to particular social actions, and thus how knowledge is constructed has social consequences (Burr, 1995).

The approach taken in this thesis is that the social realities of learners and teachers are made accessible to them through the ways they categorise the world, in discursive and analytical forms. Knowledge of the world is therefore not some kind of “objective truth” but are products of sense-making that emerge from the thinking and practices of human subjects (Foucault, 1980).

Furthermore, with regard to the worldviews of teachers and learners in South Africa, discourses are historically and culturally specific, and are deeply informed by the geographical contexts in which they are situated. For every context in South Africa, for example, how teachers and learners think and act could be different had particular historical developments unfolded in particular ways, with the views of teachers and learners of their worlds also quite open to changing. As such, the study submits to a view that discourse is a form of social action, and plays an active role in producing the social worlds of teachers and learners in different contexts.

Particular discourses also help maintain specific social patterns, meaning that teachers and learners in particular social worlds cannot be assumed to possess sets of fixed or authentic characteristics, but more often than not subscribe to dominant ways of living and seeing the world that come from how they have acted until then (Foucault, 1980).

Crucially, this study approaches what teachers and learners say in their urban or rural context as a consequence of a set of social interactions that construct common ‘truths’ amongst their communities. In these social interactions, rules and regulations exist that play an important role in how teachers and learners construct meaning, and limit the forms of identity making that are possible in those spaces, as well as what they find meaningful (Foucault, 1980).

In that respect, there often exists within certain communities a set of dominant discourses that have gained hegemony over time and as a result have been able to fix meaning attached to certain issues in very particular ways. However, building on elements on how their worlds were previously constructed or understood, teachers and learners are also able to combine aspects of their different (and also new) experiences to change the ways they see and socially construct their worlds (Foucault, 1980).

### **3.6 KNOWLEDGE**

According to the Merriam-Webster (n.d.) definition, knowledge can be understood as:

- a fact or condition of knowing something with familiarity gained through experience or association;
- an acquaintance with, or understanding of, a science, art, or technique;
- the fact, or condition, of being aware of something;
- the range of a person’s information or understanding; and/or
- the sum of what is known, namely a body of truth, information, and the principles acquired by humankind.

The challenge, however, is to understand what constitutes knowledge. According to Plato, knowledge is “justified true belief” (Audi, 2003:220). Plato essentially argued that no sane person would treasure certain information as knowledge if they thought that the piece of information was worthless, and that if there were evidence to substantiate that belief, then the person would be justified in holding that belief. And, as such, “justified true belief” was regarded as a necessary condition for knowledge. This is a conception of knowledge that has been widely accepted and used until the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The key problem with this conceptualisation of ‘what constitutes knowledge’ is when “justified true beliefs” are based on false premises (Gettier, 1963), or when what individuals think they know is informed by particular dominant discourses employed by others, or when knowledge claims laden with ideological narratives influence individuals to follow narrowly circumscribed modes of behaviour (Postman & Weingartner, 2009:9).

In such situations, the meaning of knowledge often gets muddled with hierarchical educational apparatuses invested with the political oversight of modern institutions and the empirical truths of “rationalist societies” (Gordon, 1980:84). As such, what Foucault refers to as the “insurrection of knowledge”, meanings, truth claims, and hence knowledge, can become contrived and informed by political motives that prioritise the interests of ruling elites, and become bound up in “empirical truths” and “rationalist-conceived truths” that serve as barometers that give weight to the veracity of various truth and knowledge claims.

For Foucault (1980), the word “knowledge” is intended to convey a double meaning, namely knowing a field *of* knowledge and the modalities of knowledge (*about*), both of which come together when knowledge (science, expertise, and technique) is deployed in order to get to know human subjects. For Foucault, the knowledge/power hybrid constitutes the ways in which power relations and the formation of social scientific knowledge are formed, and determines what will be known (rather than individual thinkers developing ideas and knowledge). In this regard, the production of knowledge also represents a direct claim for power, and for control of how societies and categories of people are produced (Mills, 2003:70). Knowledge “brings into being” what was not previously known, or what did not “previously exist” as a target of social regulation (Foucault, 1980).

This suggests that any discussion about knowledge requires an engagement with ‘experts’ and ‘their knowledge’, which essentially determine how people should act and who they are. Knowledge is thus a political project that is bound up in the goals of the modern state and what it seeks to achieve (Mills, 2003). Knowledge in that respect constitutes a set of relationships between what is known, between the sets of rules that determine what should be known, and between how people think, know, and write about it (Foucault, 1980).

### 3.7 CONCLUSION

As with Foucault (1977; 1980), who was always keen not to reduce research participants to research “objects”, this study attempted to develop a conceptual framework that did not lay claim to projecting universal meanings (of key concepts). It reminds that in particular contexts

– as in the rural areas of the Eastern Cape – power assumes particular forms with regard to the ideological and contested character of the schools that were researched, the pressure groups within the schools that lobby for ideological dominance, and the political duplicities of the policy environments in which the schools operate.

How education and its goals are pursued in these contexts are informed by sets of value judgements (power) about the ability and value of groups of learners, as well as their positions within the schooling system. For the study, the focus on discipline is an attempt to grapple with the role and thinking of teachers in shaping learner interpretations of value, belonging, and autonomy, and how power and knowledge intersect with disciplinary techniques to produce particular ways of thinking about this.

The next chapter offers some insights into writings/literature about discipline, power, and knowledge with respect to how teachers and learners contest control in the classroom and in their schools.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter outlined the conceptual framework that was developed for this study. This chapter expands on how different thinkers and writers have described, discussed, and theorised about school discipline, power, and knowledge. Also, until recently, literature on school discipline has primarily focused on punitive and reactionary remedies for misconduct and less focus has been given to proactive disciplinary codes and their philosophical underpinnings (Fenning & Bohanon, 2006:1024).

This chapter examines the nature of discipline problems in schools and illuminates some of the causes attached to this in the literature. First focusing on the South African context, and exploring disciplinary links to power and knowledge, the chapter thereafter engages more broadly with other interdisciplinary perspectives on discipline.

#### **4.2 THE NATURE OF DISCIPLINE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Following a history of didactic teaching and repressive disciplinary methods, the post-1994 South African government decreed particular approaches to discipline that ultimately led to corporal punishment being outlawed after 1994 (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010:387). In so doing, the South African government instituted a juridical- and social-level ethic of human rights that emphasised the rights of, and duties to, children. Corporal punishment on this new terrain was seen as violating the dignity and rights of learners (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010).

However, with corporal punishment being outlawed, and with the South African state being unable to put in place alternative or more effective disciplinary systems in schools (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Kapueja, 2014), discipline continued to be one of the most public and contentiously discussed issues in schools.

This status quo, to a certain extent, has contributed to the persistent demoralisation and disillusionment of teachers within the profession (Department of Basic Education [DBE], 2016:5). Learners' awareness of their rights is viewed as a constraint by many teachers, who posit that the constant assertion of learner rights makes managing problematic behaviour

impossible in class, with learners seeming to think that the consequences for misconduct will not be severe (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010:392).

Since 1994, the introduction of a code of conduct has become the main measure used to codify disciplinary apparatuses within schools in South Africa. Kapueja (2014:6) states that a code of conduct aims to “establish a disciplined and purposeful school environment” where quality learning is maximised through “the bringing of order”. She argues that codes of conduct provide order, consistency, and familiarity with the school context and the terms on which teachers and learners can engage. Similarly, Ntuli (2013) investigated ways of managing discipline in selected secondary schools within the Sekhukhune district in Limpopo. She argues that parental involvement, mentorship, and suspension for serious offences are necessary to help in getting learners to abide by codes of conduct.

According to the public media and state officials, however, the key challenge in the current environment is that many learners do not seem to be ‘on board’ with new disciplinary methods, and do not seem to think that school management and teachers have consulted widely enough about what is acceptable conduct in schools and what is not. Many deem this status quo to be a consequence of generational differences as well as changes in the political realities of South Africa post-1994. This is further discussed below.

#### **4.2.1 The born frees and their contested outlook on discipline**

A key explanation for the challenge of discipline in contemporary South Africa is tied to what is categorised as the post-apartheid generation, or the “born frees”, who supposedly show less interest in playing an active role in civil society (Mattes, 2011). Some say this is because most of the born frees do not feel that their participation would be effective and that whatever they do would not be meaningful enough to expend energy on it. Others claim that the born frees are spoiled and that they did not experience previous legal disenfranchisement or “real pain”. Still others suggest that the political orientations of the generation of born frees has not been blighted by racial prejudice, and thus they do not feel as strongly about the key issues that dominate the media and the older generations.

Whichever explanation is followed, what the “liberated subjectivities” of current learners suggest, however, is that if adults and learners are not in agreement about what society needs or what society should look like, then the purpose or goals of disciplinary mechanisms and practices is immediately undermined (Best & Kellner, 1997:6).



Research findings show that “having the power to say no” does set contemporary learners apart from previous generations, especially in relation to political activities (Mattes, 2011), but that the greater implication for social order lies in the disconnect it creates between the different generations. It warns about the dangers when adults set up social and institutional criteria and boundaries that no longer pertain to the ways learners think about the world, and when learners’ awareness of their rights and their powers lead to them reject disciplinary practices that hold no currency for any of them in their immediate worlds.

This breakdown in communication was previously addressed through reminding learners about ‘who was in charge’ and through mostly beating them. Ironically, as Bray *et al.* (2010) note, the techniques that many adults currently use in a democratic dispensation are no less violent, insidious, or disciplinary; for example, parents who threaten learners that they will send them to the rural areas to learn ‘discipline’ if they do not behave. Bray *et al.*’s (2010) study of youths in Cape Town found that the parents of black South African learners often threaten their children with being sent to rural schools to be taught “traditional” physically enforced discipline.

Recognising the importance to better understand the “lost generation” allows for disciplinary practices, and their purposes, to be thought of and addressed in different and alternative ways. It would, for example, prevent learners from being stigmatised as “deviant” and “dangerous” in situations where all they did was think differently (Seekings, 1996). What the literature on the born frees highlights is that deviance, misconduct, and thinking differently are easily conflated in the school environment, and how these are understood is often informed by the knowledge and experience that particular learners bring into the school environment.

#### **4.2.2 Contemporary challenges towards discipline**

A number of studies since 2008 have observed very high levels of risk behaviour amongst learners in South Africa. For example, in the 2011/2012 Youth Risk Behavioural Survey, 49% of learners in the sample reported having consumed alcohol in their lifetime, with 32% having drunk alcohol in the month preceding the survey, and 25% involved in binge drinking. Thirteen percent (13%) of learners reported having smoked marijuana, 12% abusing inhalants, 5% took cocaine, 6% ‘tik’, and 5% mandrax (Reddy *et al.*, 2012). In partnership with the Medical Research Council, the survey found that 36% of the learners in Grades 8-11 at selected public schools in nine provinces reported having had sex, with 12% noting their age of initiation of sexual activity to be under 14 years old. Forty-seven percent (47%) of learners had had more

than two sexual partners in their lifetimes (Reddy *et al.*, 2012). The Behavioural Survey further showed that 13% of learners reported carrying guns, with 16% admitting to belonging to gangs, and 9% noting that they had been forced to have sex in their lifetimes (Reddy *et al.*, 2012). In other studies, on school property 7% of learners admitted to carrying weapons to school, with 21% of them feeling unsafe at school, and 12% being threatened or injured by someone carrying a weapon to school (Garish *et al.*, 2011).

If these data were used to determine whether learners are ill-disciplined and bring chaos to South African school classrooms, a sizeable number of learners would be sent home daily. The above concerns are confirmed by the work of Roussouw (2003), who recorded the main types of learner misconduct in South African schools as dagga usage, smoking, examination dishonesty, assault, and exposure to pornography. Roussouw's (2003) research findings revealed that noisiness, playing with cellular phones, tardiness, vandalism, and substance abuse also feature prominently as disruptive behaviours in South African schools. Similarly, Marais and Meier (2010) note in their qualitative study on disruptive behaviour in the Foundation Phase in primary schools that fighting, bullying, stealing, bad language, and vandalism are very prominent offences.

In both studies three worrisome research approaches and assumptions emerge, namely:

- The prevalence of behavioural challenges amongst learners in different age cohorts is often attributed to lack of parental care and the lack of adult role models in the lives of the learners;
- The lack of respect for authority, verbal aggression, ego-centricism, lack of anger management skills, malicious gossip, and attraction to gangsterism can generally be accorded to learners across all age groups, which suggests that the same approaches to discipline for all ages are acceptable;
- Mankind's "disconnection with God" is the root cause of antisocial tendencies and that an intensified focus on Christian principles would achieve moral regeneration. In these approaches, physical disciplinary methods deployed using biblical tenets were seen as a necessary part of discipline and social reinvigoration; and
- Disrespect towards educators was cited as the root cause of all other more serious behavioural maladjustments in learners. As this caused "educators to be uncertain, confused and afraid", the overemphasis on learner human rights, the studies concluded, precipitated the breakdown in the moral fibre of society (Roussouw, 2003; Marais & Meier, 2010).

Social media is often also seen to be a further worrying contributor to societal concerns about violence and discipline. For example, in 2001, the Minister of Education commissioned the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) to conduct an inquiry into initiation practices in South African schools (SAHRC, 2001). What prompted the initiative were disconcerting media stories about widespread initiation practices that apparently constituted gross human rights violations. Grim newspaper headlines about the impact of this on state of discipline in South African schools led to the SAHRC concentrating on different manifestations of school-based violence such as bullying, gender-based violence, discrimination, physical violence, and psychological violence, and noting the adverse effects on school discipline if initiation practices and rituals are not properly regulated (SAHRC, 2001). Report findings highlighted that societal paranoia can often be exaggerated and tied to processes in schools that exacerbate discipline into a bigger social problem.

This is of great concern, as it collapses social concerns and problems in society with those in schools and stigmatise learners in ways that thereafter produces their behaviour. The United Nations Organisation Guidelines for Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency (UNO 45/112, 1990:1) caution that:

“In the predominant opinion of experts, labelling a young person as ‘deviant’, ‘delinquent’ or ‘pre-delinquent’ often contributes to the development of a consistent pattern of undesirable behaviour by young persons.”

### **4.3 CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION**

A consistent theme in the literature posits that school discipline cannot be conceived of as an instrument but that it is a fundamental part of the sociological make-up of schools. According to Waghid and Davids (2013), for example, discipline represents a particular “pedagogical encounter between teachers and learners”. Put differently, they argue that learners’ prolonged interactions with teachers predispose them to socially coherent existences that are in line with the ethos of different schools. They suggest that when teachers act with integrity and deference towards learners, that this influences learners to want to emulate them (teachers) as preferred role models. Often, despite having different values and dispositions than learners, good teachers can sensitively manage difference in the classroom and enable positive attitudes and behaviour if they think differently about discipline.

Waghid and Davids (2013) argue that citizenship education can enact political coexistence under conditions of cultural diversity, conflict, and strife. They note that:

“[w]hen the inner self does not respond favourably to another, it becomes hard not to betray [one’s feelings] outwardly” (Waghid & Davids, 2013:10).

The above represents the kind of approach that underpinned the shift after 1994 to a strong disposition towards human rights. It is observed that school pedagogies are imbued with power interests that may deprive learners of the right to enjoy unfettered democratic participation in civil society, and that a framework was needed that did not encourage pseudo participation, but committed involvement (Bryant, Johnston & Usher, 2004; Freire, 2005; Ovens & Tinning, 2009).

The problem, however, was that, notwithstanding benevolent notions of citizenship, “committed involvement” comprises of a complex negotiation of subjectivities vested with different forms of power and discursive positionality. Quite different forces contribute to the inculcation of particular behaviours and attitudes in learners, and if there are no strong outside pressures to get school communities to collaborate and cohere in particular ways, disciplinary sanctions can be developed in ways that simply focus on subduing ‘rogue elements’ and largely ignore the need to develop democratic, participatory processes.

#### **4.4 STRATEGIES TO COMBAT INDISCIPLINE**

##### **4.4.1 Cultivating a sense of belonging**

Part of the big focus on democratic participation in civil society and the human rights of learners could be attributed to Hirschi’s control theory of delinquency, where he notes that individuals tend to care for one another and that they stand to gain significantly from being ‘equal’ in one another’s company. Approaches towards delinquency thus can add value to understanding state interventions within schools – in how officials conceive of learners. Hirschi’s (1969) main proposition was as follows:

“The more weakened the groups to which [the individual] belongs, the less he depends on them, the more he consequently depends only on himself and recognises no other rules of conduct than what are founded on his private interests.”

For Hirschi (1969) the sense of belonging of different learners imposed certain constraints on their conduct, and thus learners would not want to disappoint those with whom bonds of

friendship are shared if these were fostered in positive environments. Hirschi argued that young people would typically go to great lengths to please their peers, and given that most transgressions in schools could be attributed to peer pressure, the fostering of positive relationships could reduce indiscipline in schools.

Hirschi (1969) noted, however, that learner allegiances with teachers could easily scupper these friendships, especially when the views and willpower of teachers predominated. It was thus important to both foster learner friendships and strong senses of belonging, and good relationships with teachers. This, argued Hirschi (1969), brought teachers and learners into formidable partnerships in the learning project; partnerships that served as an obstacle or remedy for the proneness of learners to delinquency.

This literature served to ask which transactions in schools best reinforce bonds of loyalty between schools and learners, and how agency in learner behaviour could be better supported.

#### **4.4.2 School-wide positive behaviour support (SWPBS) models**

The literature also emphasises school-wide positive behaviour support (SWPBS) systems in order to reduce indiscipline in schools. It is a behaviourally based approach to discipline that establishes a connection between individual behaviour and the school contexts in which learners are situated.

The behavioural model is guided by three main tenets: (a) prevention, (b) theoretically sound and evidence-based practice, and (c) systems implementation (Sugai & Horner, 2006). The model is operationalised through the teaching of relevant social skills, rewarding acceptable behaviour, and organising teaching and learning environments in ways that frown upon inappropriate behaviour (Sugai & Horner, 2006). In this sense, SWPBS aligns with Hirschi (1969) with an emphasis on environmental factors and their possible influence on the positive conduct of learners.

The literature emphasises SWPBS-inspired strategies that match policy proposals with conceptually sound and research-based practices, and develop protocols for schools that organise behaviour and disciplinary issues according to school effectiveness and efficiency concerns. However, a concern in the literature is in that the model approaches human behaviour in very mechanistic ways, where life is defined in measurable terms and not as an inner experience. Cohen *et al.* (2007:17) note that this approach “diminishes choice, freedom,

individuality, and moral responsibility”, but that it is often regarded as effective in managing behaviour.

#### 4.4.3 Canter’s Assertive Discipline

The Canter model emphasises the right of learners to school climates that match their life aspirations. In this model, schools have duties to learners to create spaces of mutual trust and respect between learners and teachers, grounded on the following eight tenets:

- 1) Learners have clear rights and needs that must be met if they are to be taught effectively.
- 2) Teachers have rights and needs in the classroom as well.
- 3) The most effective teachers are those who remain in control of the class – while always remembering that their main duty is to help learners learn and behave responsibly.
- 4) A good discipline plan, based on trust and respect, is necessary for helping learners limit their counterproductive behaviour.
- 5) Learners should enjoy positive support when they behave acceptably.
- 6) Teachers must not only model proper class behaviour but directly teach it as well.
- 7) Teachers must successfully teach learners typically thought of as difficult to manage.
- 8) Teachers are most effective when they use proactive, rather than reactive, approaches to discipline (Charles, 2005:39).

The Canter model sought to help teachers become the “captains of their classrooms” and positively influence learner behaviour. It is posited that assertive discipline could be democratic and cooperative – but depend on the type of teachers in schools. Canter identified three types of teachers based on how they interacted with learners: hostile teachers, non-assertive teachers, and assertive teachers.

**Hostile teachers** were seen as aloof and had overbearing attitudes towards learners. They wielded military-style discipline that relied on issuing orders without attaching emotional significance to their interaction with learners. The fact that these teachers demand obedience without allowing for productive engagement made learners fearful and resentful towards them (Charles, 2005).

**Non-assertive teachers** lacked the enthusiasm to engage meaningfully with learners and teaching programmes. They regarded learners as hindrances rather than as interesting partners in teaching and learning projects. They loathed the company of learners and were only there

for the pecuniary value of teaching (Charles, 2005). They did not regard teaching as an exciting and emotionally rewarding experience.

**Assertive teachers** were fair but firm in the manner in which they exercised school discipline (Charles, 2005). They were open-minded about learners' strengths and weaknesses. Their empathetic approach earned them the trust and admiration of learners, with their impartial stances allowing them to enforce discipline without any fear or favour. They found solace in the realisation that if transgressions were not dealt with fairly and justly, then the resultant situation would be prejudicial to the best interests of learners (Charles, 2005:40).

The above are but three strategies that speak directly to how discipline in schools is conceptualised in the literature. Often, even though the strategies have different ideological underpinnings and purposes, officials developing disciplinary approaches and protocols tend to conflate them, and attempt to incorporate approaches that address issues of delinquency, positive behaviour, and the rights of teachers and learners in classrooms to acceptable learning climates. Each of the approaches highlights key limitations in the literature. More importantly, however, they highlight how easily ideology, knowledge, power, and discipline can be aligned in challenging and problematic ways.

#### **4.5 SCHOOL DISCIPLINE AND THE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVE**

Postmodernism signals a shift from the above metanarratives dominant in social science. It depicts how researchers and informants in common debates create multi-layered worldviews in which reality and truth claims are discursively constructed.

Postmodernism embraces a diversity of "regimes of truth" in which language and interpretation play a pivotal role. Sweetman (2005:140) claims that there is no objective knowledge, and thus knowledge is contextual, culture bound, and produced as discourses of power.

While the literature review thus far has covered a few perspectives on how discipline is conceptualised in different times and contexts, more theory-based literature also engages with discipline as a multi-layered concept that at different times incorporates perspectives that serve political and discursive intentions. In that sense, Nietzsche observed that there are "no facts, only interpretations" (Best, 2008:54), with actors playing big parts in framing the ways they see their social worlds.

Adopting a postmodern approach, Jacobs and Kritsonis (2006) suggest that given the rapid changes in education in contemporary society, there is a need to understand discipline in ways

that treats each child as unique and deserving of policy attention, and not in relation to current preferences for conformity, boundaries, and routine. They caution that school discipline is often caricatured in the following way:

“School discipline is seen as a necessary evil in the modern society and is good for all children and adults. It is thought to bring about structure and rules that all members must obey collectively” (Jacobs & Kritsonis, 2006:3).

Jacobs and Kritsonis (2006) note, however, that it is difficult to focus on the needs of diverse learners within a framework of norms and standards and with educational practitioners largely ill-trained and ill-equipped to work according to new protocols. They argue that teachers tend to revert in such situations to previous modernist approaches to discipline that focus on using scientific political controls. Jacobs and Kritsonis (2006) argue for teachers to be innovative and unencumbered by rigid bureaucratic controls, and to break free from the safety nets that confine them within scientifically circumscribed boundaries.

#### **4.5.1 Foucault and the break with modernism**

The work of Michel Foucault is perhaps the most convincing postmodern account of discipline and power. According to Foucault (1977), power is an overarching concept that defines every aspect of human interaction and thus social situations that prevail in institutions like schools are engineered and legitimated by power relations and informed by discourses that serve as the main instruments through which power is conveyed (cited by Gaventa, 2003).

Foucault (1977) would argue that all social interactions between learners and teachers in schools are discursive constructions, and thus even contemporary, “progressive” disciplinary protocols such as school codes of conduct are overt attempts to gain leverage over learners and influence them to act in certain predetermined ways. Codes of conduct, Foucault (1980) would argue, are meant to condition learners to internalise behavioural patterns sanctioned by the school, and to sanction potential transgressors when they violate school rules. With codes of conduct learner actions would be scripted in anticipation of possible disciplinary measures. Power would thus be invested in bureaucratic structures, with teachers using hierarchical and legislative authority to enforce learner obedience (Rabinow, 1984).

With codes of conduct, power would work in subtle ways to subdue its targets through modes of surveillance that capture at ‘the bottom’ records for late-coming, roll-calls to mark who is present and who is absent, criminal or juvenile records, and attention-deficit order lists, and at



‘the top’ records of top achievers. These forms of information are accessible to teachers and disciplinary practitioners that use them for ongoing screening of their subjects (Rabinow, 1984).

In that way, where authorities know the intimate details of the attributes or mannerisms of subjects, changes in the rhythms of institutional routines could be used to signal a looming crisis, or a momentary lapse in disciplinary focus (Rabinow, 1984). It thus becomes relatively easy to launch countermeasures to forestall subversive learner actions. McLaren, interviewed by Barton (2001), presents this as when:

“[d]ominant discourses of science work to serve the interests of the powerful by masking their claims in a neutral view-from-nowhere position”.

Ironically, the motifs of power within codes of conduct are such that parallels can be drawn between the modes of surveillance of schools to that of prisons. The disciplinary methodologies employed by practitioners in both institutions yield similar outcomes, with control yielded through supposedly more discreet and humane methods. Both institutions apply technologies of discipline that target the mental faculties of subjects with the intention of making them self-disciplining and self-correcting (Rabinow, 1984), signal a departure from outmoded forms of punishment that previously restrained the body (corporal punishment), and that operates in the realm of subduing the will of subjects.

With codes of conduct, a key difference with older forms of disciplinary enforcement, however, is that learners as well as teachers are forced to adhere to codes of conduct, with the result that learners and teachers are often locked in contest for power over given situations. In such contexts and driven by certain levels of agency, learners could mount formidable resistance against the constraints imposed codes of conduct.

In this power configuration, the surveillance and screening of individuals give members of the dominant class (whether teachers or learners) a key vantage point and allow them to anticipate movements and countermovements to keep them at the advantage. Discipline in schools, in such a situation, transforms the mindsets of subjects into allies that serve the interests of those in power (Foucault, 1977:102).

Foucault traced a social narrative in which “the practice of torturing prisoners was replaced by close surveillance of them by means of prison rules” (Sadan, 2004:55). To illustrate this point, the study problematises the motives of education lawmakers, for example, in the South African Schools Act (SASA, Act No. 84 of 1996):

“The Code of Conduct must inform the learners of the way in which they should conduct themselves at school in preparation for their conduct and safety in civil society. It must set a standard for moral behaviour for learners and equip them with the expertise, knowledge, and skills they would be expected to evince as worthy and responsible citizens.”

According to Foucault (1977), the object envisaged in the clause “a worthy and responsible citizen” would be learners that through the educative process aspire to ‘please’, given that society handsomely rewards those that fit the description. The assumption in SASA is that such personalities have strong aversions to civil disobedience, and that through disciplinary technologies, schools can be mechanisms for creating citizens predisposed to advocate for the perpetuation of what they believe is socio-economic “utopia”.

Ironically, in the case of South Africa, advocating allegiance to the Constitution, in a Foucaultian sense, can strengthen the grip of ruling elites on power. The dominant classes would regard individuals that show allegiance to the Constitution and to modernist ideals as less likely to revolt against the status quo, and thus they would not need to be forcibly obliged to ‘lines of action’ enshrined within the constitution. This give learners attending better resourced schools with better opportunities to succeed, as well as make them less likely to be regularly disciplined or sanctioned.

In contemporary society, resistance to power has diminished prospects for success when mounted on the rules crafted by the institution at which the onslaught is directed. The whole edifice of school discipline elicits obedience through the operation of ideological interests that internalise and perpetuate social inequalities (Rabinow, 1984).

#### **4.5.2 Criticising the critic**

According to Foucault (1977), in disciplinary processes both perpetrators and victims are complicit and guilty, with power equally dispersed between those in the lower social classes and the elites. This seems absurd and simplistic and does not adequately show real shifts in power for the disadvantaged and previously oppressed. Surely, in many cases, new policies and disciplinary regimes have been shown to be significant advances on old renderings of power, and to reconfigure the realities of many teachers and learners.

Where Foucault’s views do help, however, is to provide a vantage point from which to critique current configurations of power and the intersection with knowledge and discipline, as well as

provide a more nuanced engagement with systems of human relations within institutions like schools (Turner, 2002).

#### 4.6 THE DYNAMICS OF VIOLENCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOLS

In a 2012 study Mncube and Harber bring to light the stark realities of South African schools and paint a fairly grim picture of the rampant violence afflicting them. They argue that violence is at the root of why most South African learners, according to the South African Institute of Race Relations (SAIRR), do not feel safe at school. As they note, this violence is both internal and external to schools and are not mutually exclusive. In other words, there is no clear demarcation between the two:

*A 16-year-old boy was killed at Bauvallon Secondary School in Valhalla Park, Western Cape. The learner was stabbed by another learner during breaktime. Three others were wounded. In another incident, an 18-year-old boy was stabbed once in the neck and died outside the school gates of Vorentoe High School in Auckland Park, Johannesburg-, allegedly in a fight over a ball.*

In that respect, as Mncube & Harber (2013) observe, codes of conduct do very little to curb the current tide of violence engulfing South African schools. Codes of conduct do however signify the kinds of mechanisms that may aid the cultivation of violence-free schools, where in certain situations functional schools are able to foresee and therefore intercept external threats more effectively.

This is of course all the more difficult in situations where teachers are themselves perpetrators of serious acts of violence against learners (as Mncube & Harber 2013 observe). As such, school functionality is as much about putting in place codes of conduct as they are about getting teachers to adopt ethical disciplinary stances that uphold the integrity of the teaching profession. For Mncube & Harber (2013), the cultivation of non-violent schools require the following:

1. Effective and transparent management practices;
2. Democratic and inclusive processes and mechanisms;
3. Constant and continuous teacher education development;
4. The establishment of overall school safety committees (that work efficiently and effectively);

5. Continual discussions around the kinds of alternative localised intervention strategies that would protect the rights of learners but also give teachers the means by which to sanction and guide learners that don't easily abide by school and system rules.

#### **4.7 CONCLUSION**

The key ideas that emerge from the literature review and the theoretical standpoints outlined above show that discipline as a concept is genealogically tied up with the political and ideological struggles within different societies. Schools across the world – whether first-world or third-world countries – have experienced similar ruptures in their disciplinary ethos.

The next chapter seeks to focus on the particular context of South Africa, and the rural setting of the Eastern Cape, in order to grapple with the power-knowledge grid that defines the life experiences of teachers and learners in the three designated schools.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **THE EMPIRICAL PROJECT: MAKING SENSE OF LIVED EXPERIENCES**

#### **5.1 INTERROGATING THE VOICES AT SAKHISIZWE, ZAMOKUHLE, AND NKULULEKO**

The previous chapters presented the methods used for this investigation and the key literature framing discipline, power, and knowledge. The aim of this chapter is to navigate the discourses that circulate in the three schools in the Eastern Cape, with a view to gain an understanding of how they create social realities informed by school discipline.

Interviews were conducted in order to examine a connection between lived experiences in the designated research sites and philosophical argumentation about discipline, power, and knowledge. Admittedly, interviews of teachers alone may not be an adequate portrayal of the manifestation of power dynamics that define the character of the three schools. It is hoped that they will, however, provide insights into how these arrangements function to sanction and produce certain forms of discipline and knowledge.

This section highlights how teachers in the three schools struggled to embrace the dispensation of a new constitutional order, and the challenges that they are confronted with daily. The researcher, as the facilitator, detected contradictions in how they understood their disciplinary practices. For example, through interaction with the informants it emerged that school discipline is a topic that conjures up images of corporal punishment in the minds of teachers. But as teachers were initially quite sceptical of the researcher's bona fides, they seemed wary of giving deeper answers on the issues as this might implicate them in some way.

For the study, a key methodological challenge was how to instil a sense of trustworthiness and anonymity in the process in order to persuade teachers to share their views. In conformity with research ethics, the names designated to individuals and places (like Duduza Municipality) in this thesis are pseudonyms. In this way, anonymity and confidentiality are assured. The study's main focus was to understand how teachers perceived the decorum of the schools' code of conduct and how this illuminated the disjuncture between policy proclamations and the outcomes of educational endeavours.

## 5.2 THEMATIC PRESENTATION

Findings presented in this chapter are arranged according to themes. This allows for the presentation of the data in ways that speak to the research questions in interlinking ways. What follows is a broad framework of the questions that were posed by the researcher. Notably, the questionnaire was quite tentative and in no way claims to be a structured research protocol. The aim was to ask open-ended questions with a view to generate spontaneous responses from informants, such as:

1. What do teachers say about school discipline?
2. How does the human rights culture impact power relations between teachers and learners, and between a learner and his or her peers?
3. How are teachers coping with the new disciplinary code of ethics that is grounded on constitutional values?
4. How do teachers use power and knowledge to negotiate their way through teaching and learning spaces?

These are taken up in the following themes. Also, secondary findings are used to support and evaluate the analysis of findings in the chapter to follow, and are not included here.

- *Policy and power*, which engage with the policy context on discipline and how these function in school power arrangements.
- *Corporal punishment as order*: As teachers reflected on their experiences of corporal punishment as learners, and their disciplining methods now, it became apparent that they were expressing corporal punishment as a nostalgic means of enforcing order and structure.
- *Discipline and age*, which show how disciplining methods change as learners' age and their autonomy shifts. It also engages with teachers and how age shapes their attitudes to disciplining learners.
- *Internal power struggles* look at how teachers themselves are disciplined by the school surveillance machinery and the alternative methods they propose to manage learner misconduct.

The themes allow for the statements of participants to be understood alongside one another, in order to generate viewpoints of how discipline functions in the different schools. Common problems and challenges emerged in the interviews, which prompted the researcher to consider the role of context in shaping the nexus of discipline, power, and knowledge in these schools.

### 5.2.1 Policy and power

The preceding literature review suggested that the dawn of democracy in 1994, and the subsequent promulgation of policy that banned corporal punishment disoriented some teachers who were accustomed to the switch. In interviews, teachers responded to questions about how the policy changes affected their approaches to discipline. Corporal punishment featured prominently in their responses – as the essence of enforcing discipline.

Chichi, of Zamokuhle, in her mid-thirties, is the daughter of a teacher. In recounting her experiences of how they (as learners) used to be disciplined, she pointed out that in the past teachers were a law unto themselves as far as discipline is concerned. Their arbitrary approach often put them at loggerheads with learners”

*“Punishment was dispensed uniformly regardless of the gravity of the offence that you committed. There was nothing like imposing punishment that fits the crime. What you got depended on the teacher’s mood on that particular day.”*

Yet, although she despised corporal punishment in her school days, she is of the view that

*“[w]ith the benefit of hindsight, I must say it was the bitter pill that we had to swallow, but some say today that it worked”.*

Shed, a head of department (HOD) at Sakhisizwe, felt that current policies in a democratic South Africa make a mockery of the teaching profession. He admitted that corporal punishment was outlawed, but claimed that it remained the only real and viable instrument for curbing the tide of ill-discipline at his school. He pointed out the contradictions between policy pronouncements by authorities and teacher practices with regards to discipline in the following way:

*“There was talk of change in political circles but in the classroom we had to continue with the usual practices, and corporal punishment was central in how we resolved matters of discipline. Somewhere, I think in the mid-2000s, when the government became more decisive about the prohibition of corporal punishment, we became more cautious with it, but we never completely abandoned it. We could not. Perhaps the criminal cases we see on TV and in newspapers are the reason why we have finally slackened our reliance on the switch. Today teachers are obviously more discreet about corporal punishment.”*

Peter, an older colleague of Chichi's at Zamokuhle, seemed to agree with Shed, that the new policy terrain affected the abilities of teachers to enforce discipline on unruly learners. He claimed that the Bill of Rights is a damning indictment of a modern school system that does not empower teachers at local levels, nor deals with specific challenges in different areas – like in rural environments. Peter (Zamokuhle) described the apparent impunity for transgressions committed by what he perceived as delinquent teenagers as:

*“The people that are covered by the Bill of Rights, in our case, are the children. Children only have rights, and they don't have to go down with the responsibility. This is where the discipline breaks, when the learner does not take the responsibility.”*

It is Peter's view, and that of his other colleagues such as Phinda below, that the post-liberation policies which are underpinned by the Bill of Rights and the Constitution, are too generous on dispensing rights to learners. As a consequence of this, teachers are disempowered, meaning that their capacity to discipline learners is restrained.

There was a general feeling among the teachers that the Bill of Rights has thrown the post-apartheid schooling system, especially township and rural schools, into disarray. Older members of staff in the three schools felt that modern-day learners had little respect for the rule of law. However, some teachers, although in the minority, were optimistic about the new constitutional order. These teachers believed that conceding more rights to learners engendered in them a spirit of self-reliance.

Phinda, an elderly teacher at Nkululeko, had this to say:

*“[w]hen you take democracy too far, it can be a slap in the face”.*

She argued that overburdening learners with governance matters was prejudicial to the teacher's loco parentice status. She cited with disdain the policy guidelines which used to confer on learners the right to be involved in the appointment of teachers. According to her, such anomalous policy positions had far-reaching implications towards school discipline. This implies that a teacher who gained employment through a learner member of the employment panel may feel obliged to compromise his or her disciplinary principles in order to accommodate his or her defacto employer. Phinda (Nkululeko) claimed that teachers at his school were frustrated by the prevailing uncertainty in alternative disciplinary strategies. Shed (Sakhisizwe) concurred:



*“I’ve learned that the department promulgated alternatives to corporal punishment. But I cannot lie, I have not seen such a document in our school.”*

The researcher also observed that the topic of school discipline elicited responses that aligned with the political orientations of participants. Many of those who had close connections with the liberation struggle were supportive of the South African Schools Act (SASA) and its stance on learners and their human rights. This contention, however, needs to be tested further to determine its objective validity.

All the interviewed teachers were in agreement that learner discipline is a function of both teachers and parents in shared responsibility. They observed that teachers and parents were differently, but equally, responsible for the major processes of socialisation that learners must go through.

Nyamazana, at Sakhisizwe, explained it as follows:

*“Sometimes, the way we are brought up in our homes [is] in an informal way and we come to school, we are nurtured the formal way at school now. And then it’s when we are taught how to behave, how to respect classmate[s] or teacher[s], your parents, and so on.”*

Swartbooi, at Zamokuhle, exclaimed in his interview:

*“You know as well as I do that schooling tames our barbaric instincts. An uneducated person is like an uncut diamond ... rough on the edges. School refines the person. The way you dress, or let’s say the way you present yourself and your table manners ... you get that from the school. Look at our uneducated brothers and sisters who dropped out of school. They live in [squalor] ... in the shacks with nothing to do.”*

Both Swartbooi and Nyamazana viewed the school and its disciplinary ethos as an instrument to fix the behavioural oddities acquired from the home front. This coalesces with the views of few other teachers who felt that post-apartheid parents were too lax on matters of discipline.

Dongwe, at Nkululeko, stated:

*“These learners don’t know their position, but in this school we have the capacity to put them in their place. Parents can sometimes be an obstacle, especially those who are enlightened about human rights [own emphasis]. They are good at pointing [out] our mistakes, but they fail to teach their children*

*right and wrong. But we have managed to hold the school together despite numerous challenges.”*

However, this standpoint about parents that protect their children’s rights and are an obstacle to school discipline was often at odds with the standpoints of parents that demand that teachers use more punitive means to discipline their children. At Sakhisizwe, according to Shed, parents place teachers in difficult positions by actually expecting them to use corporal punishment on learners:

*“Corporal punishment remains the policy of the school because parents don’t want to hear anything about stopping it. To them that is irrelevant. They seem to think that they have the right to decide how their children must be brought up ... irrespective of whether their stance is legal or not.”*

What this highlights is that parents and teachers are invariably locked in contentious battles over learner discipline, with teachers located at awkward junctures within school disciplinary machineries. It is they who suffer the repercussions of using physical punishment to control learners, and it is they who are blamed when they do not ‘keep learners in line’. And then, as in Dongwe’s (Nkululeko) example, teachers are prepared to risk legal action and use corporal punishment because they believe parents are failing to instil good behaviour at home.

For most teachers, new education and human rights policies are important ways of addressing learner and parent needs, but not at the cost of order in schools. For them, promoting order and structure in schools is paramount, and that for teachers to teach well and maintain order, strong forms of school discipline are needed. How corporal punishment is seen to contribute to this is discussed in the next section.

### **5.2.2 Corporal punishment as order**

Participant teachers were asked to reflect on their own experiences of schooling in rural contexts, alongside their current realities as teachers. In these reflections, they conveyed memories of physical punishment at school and often compared them to their present practices. In such cases, they displayed significant contradiction and ambiguity in their attitudes towards physical punishment and school discipline.

Chichi, at Zamokuhle, reflected the following:

*“Our teachers did not hesitate to use the cane. But back in the day the word ‘corporal punishment’ didn’t have such a negative connotation that it has*

*assumed these days. In lower classes we were struck with a chalkboard duster on the tip of our fingers and, as you can imagine, the pain was excruciating. Another version of it was when you had to put your hand flat on the desk and the teacher beat the hell out of you on your knuckles with a ruler. It looked like the disciplinary methods were sort of ... well-rehearsed. Punishment was dispensed uniformly regardless of the gravity of the offence that you committed. There was nothing like imposing punishment that fits the crime. What you got depended on the teacher's mood on that particular day. We even predicted the beatings from the attire that the teacher was wearing on that particular day. We had a male teacher in Grade Nine who ... when he wore an armband ... we knew that a volley of beatings was coming on that day. In lower classes, between the ruler and the duster you never really knew which one was going to seal your fate until you saw it coming."*

Chichi (Zamokuhle) noted that besides the physical pain, the psychological pain was equally traumatic. To a question posed to her on discipline and power, she responded as follows:

*"Of cause we hated the teacher for making our lives a living hell but what else could you do? In our minds it's how things should be ... corporal punishment was our world and we didn't know any better. We were resigned to the fact that what we had to endure was also happening to learners elsewhere. To us it was the essence of schooling. The initiation practices that are widely condemned these days were justified in our school days. The teachers' power over learners was sacrosanct."*

Chichi was of the view that the main role of corporal punishment has traditionally been to entrench the dominance of the elderly members of society over the younger generation. To accept and to internalise the notion that the infliction of physical pain by figures of authority over subservient children is to their best interest. She observed the following:

*"The rough treatment of those days ... that defines what we went through. For some of us, although we hated school all the same, it didn't really matter much because you thought to yourself that all of us are suffering the same. You got over it. At some point you got used to it. That is when the punishment ceased to be effective because you developed coping strategies which numbed the pain."*

According to Chichi (Zamokuhle), learners of her generation were resigned to the fact that parents, and by extension, teachers, had unfettered power over their offspring. Those who summoned enough courage to revolt against this status quo faced the risk of being ostracised by society.

*“You just closed your eyes and clenched your teeth and before you knew it, the ordeal was over. You would reach a stage where punishment was not a deterrent anymore. If you felt like satisfying your appetite for mischief, you just went ahead and did whatever. After a while it got to a point where those who braved the beatings were hero-worshipped by their less adventurous school mates.”*

Chichi (Zamokuhle) recalled an experience which she witnessed in her school days and which left an indelible mark in her memory.

*“There was this girl in my class when I was doing Grade Nine who made a mockery of the teachers’ efforts at disciplining her. While the teacher was busy lashing out with a switch on her hand, she just tilted her head slightly to one side to murmur something to the learner next to her. Teachers were so infuriated by this odd behaviour and got even more ruthless with her. But she was not bothered at all by their savagery. You would think that she got a thrill from it or she was under a spell or something. We loved her to bits. She was our hero. Regrettably, she never proceeded beyond Grade Nine. The system failed her and those cruel teachers got away with murder – they killed that girl’s future.”*

In that respect, despite his concern that learners are given too much power in schools, Phinda (Nkululeko) asserted that old discipline methods did not work because they did not encourage learners to be self-regulating:

*“They were not effective because you only toed the line when the teacher was around. If I see the principal, I’ll be on my best behaviour, whereas if he is not there I’ll switch to a different behavioural mode. Even today when the class is left alone, it becomes chaotic and this will often attract the principal’s attention. How come it is okay to hit children, whereas we cry foul when we as adults are threatened with violence?”*

In that regard, the participant teachers were fairly divided on the merits of physical punishment. Some thought that it was objectionable on moral grounds and does not have a place in a

civilised society. Others disagreed and claimed that corporal punishment is the panacea for all the disciplinary ills confronting our schools today.

Lindelani, (Nkululeko), was of the view that physical punishment was necessary to deal decisively with “mischief”. He viewed it as the essence of schooling and therefore used it with a clear conscience. He felt a deep sense of gratitude towards his teachers for “*not sparing the rod*” on him.

*“They did a good job putting me in line. Discipline is what schools do. It forms part of the society of the school. Of course not all of us made it in life. There are those who dropped out of school ... those who couldn’t stomach the harsh punishment. But those that were successful, they benefitted from it.”*

Chichi (Zamokuhle) had a different view on this:

*“With the benefit of hindsight, I can say today that the one thing that the harsh treatment from our teachers achieved was to drive away from school a great number of our peers. I wonder if it ever crossed the teachers’ minds ... that the school could have changed the fortunes of the learners that they chased away, as most of those who dropped out were coming from poor families. Different individuals coped differently.”*

Thus, while corporal punishment had universal application, different learners experienced it differently. The lifetime impression that corporal punishment leaves on the psyche of a person cannot be underestimated. Teachers themselves are the products of a particular regime of punishment which they internalised as learners.

Chichi (Zamokuhle) noted that she later came to the realisation that physical punishment was not something that was morally justifiable in shaping the character of her classroom.

*Any teacher worth his salt will be best-advised to refrain from inflicting measures that take advantage of vulnerable children under the pretext of discipline. I have no reason to pretend to my learners that I am infallible. Corporal punishment is barbaric and no one in his right senses can dispute that fact.*

Chichi’s colleague, Zona (Zamokuhle), revealed that she preferred using embarrassment as a deterrence technique. She argued that her unconventional methods are effective in bringing the transgressor to a sober state of mind.

*“I usually isolate the troublesome ones from the rest of the class or I’ll make him perform menial duties ... for instance picking up rubbish or making him to stand alone in a corner. That’s my own version of solitary confinement. I find that this kind of treatment manages to get the learner to think long and hard about where his life of delinquency is taking him. No one wants to be embarrassed in front of their friends or girlfriends or maybe boyfriends.”*

Interviews with teachers at the different schools revealed that physical punishment was not only meted out as a remedy for “mischief” or “disobedience”. Learners were also severely beaten-up for failing to decipher the subject matter. One teacher who despised corporal punishment scornfully interjected: *“You cannot force the horse to drink from the pond if it is not thirsty in the first place.”* made an analogy which equated the beatings to forcing the horse to drink from the pond when it is not thirsty in the first place.

Kholosa (Nkululeko), who was popular for his English theatricals among his peers, gave a compelling speech.

*“Most of the pupils in my class had issues with English, particularly the Shakespearean version. We had to live, breathe and think Shakespeare, what for? Was this flooding of our minds with Anglo-Saxon literature meant to uproot us from our African identity? I thought so. If only they had spent more time teaching us the nuts and bolts of the English language rather than their preoccupation with Shakespeare’s theatricals, our issues with English could have been solved. As things were, the English lessons that we were taught had very little to do with English as a means of communication. It was just a power tool to advance white supremacy. Some people wanted us to believe that language is language and literature is literature, even the Shakespearean sort, and its value lay in honing our intellectual abilities and so we need not politicise it. I didn’t buy that crap. In fact, the African experience about education, power, and domination and cultural subversion ... called on all of us to be vigilant of Afrocentric syllabuses that are forced down our throats, see what I mean?”*

Zona (Nkululeko) enthusiastically elaborated on his experiences as a learner slightly more than a decade ago.

*“The ferocity of punishment obviously toned down in high school. I don’t know why, maybe because the high school age-group was composed of adolescents*

*whose physical stature matched that of teachers. Perhaps teachers had a sense that should they take the punishment too far, those delinquents would one day retaliate. The chances of that happening though were remote.”*

*“I suppose the way we were disciplined was to make it more psychological and less brutal as we grew older in the schooling system. At high school there was a marked decrease in the frequency of beatings. We were given chores instead – picking up litter or you were made to stand in a corner for what appeared like eternity. You stood there ... stone cold and longing for your chair. I don’t think the chores were effective in making us to obey teachers. We used to poke fun at teachers, especially when you had to be punished as a group. Instead of stressing about the sticky situation in which you found yourself, you just enjoyed the company of your partners in crime. Detention was less painful if you were detained as a group. But I will never forget the day when I was thrown into solitary confinement in a pitch-black strong-room for what appeared to be the longest two hours of my life. My sin was putting a fake snake in my class teacher’s flask. I was silently cursing ... ‘school sucks’.”*

When asked to elaborate about the merits of corporal punishment and why certain disciplinary strategies are warranted and also to link that with power and knowledge, Phinda (Nkululeko) noted the following:

*“I cannot say I did not deserve the punishment that I suffered in the hands of my tormenters. But I would have preferred to be offered an explanation of why certain behavioural tendencies were problematic. Our teachers seemed to be ignorant of the generational gap that existed between us, the new generation and them. We, as the teachers of today, unfortunately are falling into the same trap. I would have loved my teachers to devise discipline strategies and tactics that are tailor-made for me as an individual, not the one-size-fits-all kind of discipline. The lessons that we were taught, sadly, are out of touch with the realities that confront our generation. We had different character traits and therefore we deserved a different approach, you see.”*

The foregoing interviews elicited responses that shed light on how teachers in the three schools perceive discipline. The responses of teachers reflected on how they experienced discipline as learners and how their experiences have shaped their strategies as practitioners of discipline.



On the one hand there are those who are fixated with the discipline regime that entails the infliction of bodily pain. On the other hand there are voices that clamour for a shift towards a more liberal approach towards school discipline.

The next section juxtaposes the three dimensions of this inquiry, that is, discipline, power and knowledge in order to facilitate a more elaborate analysis of the research phenomenon. The analysis is going to be taken a step further by the introduction of contextual factors like age, customs and the generational gap to see how they have shaped the character of discipline in the three schools.

### **5.2.3 Discipline, age, and local tradition**

Traditionally, children are taught etiquette such that they may become attuned to the idea that “good manners are not a sign of weakness but rather they are a symbol of strength” (Boswell, 2006:8). According to Boswell (2006:8), disciplinary protocols are:

“Systems of orderly codes that aid the development of social character and culture. It establishes behavioural habits by which we treat others with honour, deference, consideration and kindness.”

In many school contexts, teachers position learners to engender respect for various social conventions but often use these rules of ‘common courtesy’ to tame youthful exuberance and even local customs.

Many teachers note that because of the placement of the schools in rural and semi-rural locales, there was a proliferation of traditional African values that were often depended on to hold the social fabric together. Many older teachers, in fact, firmly believe that the breakdown of discipline in schools currently could be attributed to the school curriculum being a ‘one-size-fits-all modern system’ that seeks to inculcate within learners modernising views about the world – views that require them to move away from traditional values.

For example, many teachers point out that “respect for elders” is paramount in local tradition, and yet learners violate this tradition “with regularity and impunity”. They assert that “talking back to an adult” is the product of modern discourses that circulate in the cultural milieu of the modern school and is not always seen as a ‘deviant act’. In the local culture of the Eastern Cape, teachers note, learners who have no qualms about talking back to elders, or who dare to look elders in the eye, stand in serious breach of a variety of cultural codes. A number of teachers noted the following:



*“They think they know best. They have the boldness to talk back to you. Siphila kumaxesha anzima [These are hard times that we are practising our craft]”* (Dongwe, Nkululeko).

*“I taught her a lesson, she must know that I am her teacher; how dare she talk to me like that?”* (Nyamazana, Sakhisizwe).

Teachers like Phinda (Nkululeko) maintain the view that a traditional value system, which encourages deference to elders, is an important part of learner socialisation in the area:

*“Discipline knows no boundaries. There are those values that apply across generations. The government, with its political motives, can declare certain actions as illegal but the essence of discipline is basically the same for all time. The truth of the matter is that parents and communities know best.”*

Other teachers recognise that learner immaturity is such that they cannot be blamed when they ‘break with tradition’. For many, the onus is on them as teachers to ‘rise above their differences’ to take the moral high ground. As Zimasa (Sakhisizwe) noted:

*“There have been extraordinary challenges which got me to the brink of my career. I can remember instances where I nearly called it quits. But I survived. There’s always that difficult learner who’ll test your patience ... to try perhaps to see the stuff you’re made of. If a learner ruffles your feathers a little bit, you must just accept that this comes with the territory and you can’t hold grudges. These are our children after all, that depend on us sharing our beliefs and customs with them in order for them to survive and in order for them to reproduce our ways of living.”*

Teachers noted, however, that as collaborators within local disciplinary networks that are meant to locate learners and their wellbeing within the collective concerns and responsibility of communities, they also expected as per tradition to be treated with the respect accorded to elders. For them, when learners butted heads with school discipline, it was more than just generational difference or contestation over power in schools, but should also be viewed as a snubbing of local custom and traditional values.

Chichi (Zamokuhle) warned that by not accommodating the local experiences, knowledge, and understandings of learners, this has an impact on building rapport with alienated learners. Despite his belief in corporal punishment, Lindelani (Nkululeko) shared Phinda’s (Nkululeko) concern that “even older disciplinary approaches do not help” hold learners accountable to

local custom, nor does it encourage them to regulate themselves. Their thinking aligns with the views of Sawyer (2005:4), who notes that instead of “approaching student discipline as a definitive right or wrong”, teachers needed to find ways of treating each situation differently and individually. Ironically, however, Sawyer (2005) represents a view that all schools, no matter their obvious individual needs, local contexts, and requirements, need to also always be oriented towards 21<sup>st</sup>-century mentalities on how to treat learners.

Indeed, while some teachers at Zamokuhle advocate a return to some kind of physical punishment, they all concede that it alone cannot succeed in developing learner capacity to attain self-discipline:

*“Strict discipline made me who I am today. But you can’t be totally dependent on external stimuli for direction. I largely owe it to myself, and my inner strength, to shape my destiny. Teachers can only do so much and the rest is up to the individual learner” (Zona, Zamokuhle).*

Lindelani’s (Nkululeko) approach is to “view the child as a child, and not a mini adult” who needs to be accommodated accordingly. Notably however, Lindelani (Nkululeko) remained steadfast about accompanying this with “tough love” that teaches “learners their place”.

In this regard, Rose (Sakhisizwe) pointed out that it is often important for both teachers and learners to respect generational gaps. She noted that it is often important that learners show loyalty to fellow learners and that this teaches them solidarity and trust – fundamental attributes that are themselves crucial to traditional customs and values. Rose (Sakhisizwe) observed in the quotation below that it is also important that teachers be seen as on the same level as parents, as this creates necessary distance between learners and teachers:

*“When it comes to my earliest memories of school discipline, what comes to my mind is the picture of the proverbial ‘good old days’. To start with, we were treated as a homogeneous bunch in lower grades. If, for instance, one person did something unsavoury, we all paid [that is], you cannot divulge who the culprit is. If so and so was involved in mischief, the whole class suffered the consequences. There was no formal enquiry or things like that. You are guilty as charged. If a question was asked, we recited a chorus of answers on top of our voices. I suppose this was a way of shielding slow learners from the wrath of the teacher who usually did not entertain wrong answers. When it comes to*

*punishment, it did not matter how hard you tried, the severity was the same regardless.”*

Rose’s (Sakhisizwe) example highlights the workings of discipline, knowledge, and power in relation to age, generational gaps, and tradition, all couched together in a single narrative. The section below highlights other internal power struggles that informed the answers of the various teacher participants with regard to school discipline.

#### **5.2.4 Internal power struggles**

This section alludes to four levels of internal power struggles for teachers, tied to different issues within the three schools. These struggles contribute to the kinds of discourses and languages that are used within the schools that frame how discipline is approached. The power struggles include:

- teachers’ own histories and expectations about their roles in schools;
- the role of political affiliation and ideology;
- institutional power struggles and contests; and
- measures that preach disciplinary care.

##### ***Personal struggles***

Teachers note that disciplinary mechanisms pertain to all inhabitants of schools. It does not matter whether learner or teacher, all are caught up within the same surveillance mechanisms of schools. Chichi (Zamokuhle), whose mother was herself a previous teacher at Zamokuhle spoke about being “held to a different standard” at the school because her mother had been an authority figure there. This was a common practice and supposedly helped keep traditions in place in the school. Chichi was thus expected to represent her mother in both “positive and negative ways” and be an extension of the school’s customary disciplinary apparatus. In a Foucaultian sense, via its established disciplinary protocols and because it employed a teacher that had previous ‘links’ to the school, Chichi was implicated in the school’s ethos and conditioned to act according to its regulations and rural customs (Rabinow, 1984).

##### ***Political affiliations***

As teachers are the first point of reference for learners to witness the code of conduct in action, as well as the school’s mission and vision, the manner in which teachers comport themselves often shape the ways in which learners view the functioning of the school, and their possibilities

for mischief. Teacher relationships with colleagues, and rivalries based on political affiliations, are also ways by which school surveillance mechanisms are enacted.

Phinda (Nkululeko) described how political tensions between teachers affected the day-to-day stability of the school:

*“Right now I think what matters the most is what political affiliation you’re in. You’ll find out that genuine educational concerns are given flimsy treatment in favour of the pursuit of narrow party political agendas. Students are quick to sense these political tensions and often exploit the situation for their own advantage.”*

Political disputes also invariably turn into personal grudges between teachers and lead to sour collegial relations. Lindelani (Nkululeko) noted that many teachers feed off existing tensions and sometimes induct new teachers into these tensions from early on. He suggested that school management on occasion benefited from feeding such disputes:

*“Take for example the case of someone who’s just joined the staff. Some of the older members usually befriend the newer member and ... they’ll feed him prejudices about his other colleagues that perhaps may be in the opposing political camp. That tendency can only fuel the flames of mistrust and divisions among teachers and is a good recipe for the proliferation of cliques. If you don’t know someone, get to know that person better by engaging in a mature conversation with her. You know what, sometimes it is the SMT [School Management Team] that is sowing seeds of division by spreading malicious rumours, and then you’ve got a problem. It is best to let someone who is new in the school to come to his own conclusions about who’s who in the zoo.”*

According to many teachers, such practices undermine good relations at the schools and fragment relationships among different staff. This, they asserted, breaks down disciplinary protocols within schools and allows for disciplinary power to become contested. Lindelani (Nkululeko) noted that common discipline protocols can be achieved when staffs collaborate and when schools interact around common problems. He cited a recent incident where local schools banded together to deal with the problem of initiation and resolved the matter via collective effort and strategising. It would not, however, be possible if current political and institutional power contests continued.

Chichi (Zamokuhle) argued that power and knowledge are firmly rooted in political legacies within the region, with differences and tensions amongst teachers within schools and across schools adding to contests over what constitutes ‘acceptable discipline’ in schools. Lindelani (Nkululeko) pointed to how learners often get access to information about these tensions and exploit them for their own purposes. By exploiting tensions between teachers, learners thus become active role players in the overall struggle for power within schools and contribute in that way to how discipline is understood and organised.

### ***Institutional power struggles and contests***

When asked about how they perceived power in schools, participants expressed their displeasure at the power wielded by those in authority, whether principals or older teachers. Teachers do not enjoy being ‘disciplined’ or mistreated in the same ways that they discipline learners, nor do they enjoy deliberate collegial competition that leads to mistrust. Teachers often envy those in authority:

*“Power gets things done at the right time and at the right place. When our principal does not get the mileage that he desires, he often warns us that failure to honour deadlines for the submission of schedules will have dire consequences. Even when you genuinely advise colleagues about their duties, they’ll ask, ‘Who are you to tell me that?’, suggesting that you’re not in the SMT and therefore cannot be taken seriously. In the staffroom they’ve even coined a derogatory term that belittles junior teachers, that is, ‘that you are Post Level 1’. I do subscribe to the notion that power is conferred by the position, but to me this is not the sufficient condition for power. People outside of line management also have a contribution to make in fulfilling the school goals. There are Post Level 1 educators who can be relied upon to lift our spirits in times of need”* (Shed, Sakhisizwe).

Zona (Zamokuhle) described power struggles at her school as crystallised within the power of the principal, who decides how order and benefits are conferred. She described the school structure as deeply despotic and hierarchical, which means that teachers do not ideally work together and instead depend on ‘orders’ from top management:

*“It is obvious that how our principal manages the school is disempowering to his subordinates because he monopolises power. This notion of power in our school is reinforced by teachers who seem to think that only the principal has*

*legitimate power to enforce discipline on learners. Teachers should be empowered to cope with discipline situations on their own. This thing of 'management by remote control' reinforces teacher notions of powerlessness. Our principal must think seriously about devolution of power. I don't need to go to the principal each time I am experiencing behavioural problems in my class. Surely, it should be up to me to enforce discipline in my class, whether the principal is there or not."*

Many teachers asserted that such centralisation of power disempowered them and stripped them of authority to effectively manage classrooms. In their reflections, they asked how they could be expected to identify and control learners when they were subjected to the same concurrent mechanisms of surveillance and discipline as learners. They noted that when they, as teachers, "call the principal", they were communicating to learners that they were unable to control them, which fed further misbehaviour and loss of classroom control. In many such instances, teachers turn to 'silent acts' of corporal punishment as a way of trying to gain control over the situation.

Shed (Sakhisizwe) stated that corporal punishment was nonetheless a very last resort for him:

*"When I see the need, I counsel the learner to find out what's bothering him. I believe that children must be heard instead of just seeing them and not taking them seriously. Once I am enlightened about the personal circumstances of the learner, then I am able to decide on remedial measures. Most of the time this strategy works, but there are cases that I have to refer to the principal or at times to social workers. I must admit that occasionally I do resort to the switch but those cases are very rare. In everything I do, I am counting on the cooperation of parents. If parents take an interest in their children's schooling, it makes my life that much easier."*

Shed's (Sakhisizwe) approach combined learner social networks between home and school to deal with problems holistically. Through his own experience, Shed (Sakhisizwe) has learnt to be patient with learners that appear difficult or uncooperative, acknowledging that there was probably a deeper problem at play.

This points to teachers having to devise new means of dealing with misconduct and controlling classrooms. It points to teachers attempting to find alternative methods to secure learner participation and cooperation, without having to resort to physical punishment.

Phinda (Nkululeko) agreed that it was necessary to work with learners to establish an orderly classroom. His concern, however, was how to do this in ways that did not make learners equal to their teachers in running the school:

*“As teachers it is easy to be caught up in the trappings of power and lose sight of the bigger picture, which is to guide the learner to adulthood. Discipline is not about me or how powerful I can be. Discipline is about the learner. Teachers are there to guide kids and not to feed their [own] egos. The time has come for teachers to establish and to sustain a genuine partnership with learners. I’ve learned to acknowledge my own strengths and weaknesses and this creates a safe environment for learners to admit to theirs as well.”*

### ***Measures that preach disciplinary care***

Many teachers confessed to struggling with learner indiscipline and being able to control learners. Many believed that finding alternative ways to secure learner investment in disciplinary codes through a combination of personal interaction, formal disciplinary channels, and methods that veered between social-psychological and corporal, would assist both them and their schools to gain legitimacy in the eyes of learners. Shed (Sakhisizwe) suggested the use of strategies that identify learner goals and ambitions:

*“To maintain discipline in my class, I’ve learned the importance of inspiring learners to want to be someone tomorrow. In my experience, I found out that if you as a teacher can keep that light shining in front of the learner, you’ll be able to align his behaviour with his career ambitions without necessarily beating him or being confrontational. If, for example, a learner has expressed his wish to be a doctor, what I do is to find out from him what he thinks is the typical behaviour of a doctor. When he goes astray, I will then courteously remind him, ‘That’s not how a doctor is supposed to behave’ or ‘That’s not how a policeman is supposed to behave’. So when you inculcate that mindset in them at a tender age, you sort of want them to focus on their dreams without being distracted by worthless pursuits.”*

Shed (Sakhisizwe) and Phinda (Nkululeko) referred to the above as benevolent forms of power or a “power of care”, that is based on reciprocity and mutual vulnerability. Shed (Sakhisizwe) asserted that mutual trust is built from an environment of mutual care and that disciplinary strategies “in this new period” would be far more effective, and, as Nomzamo (Nkululeko)



reminded, when clearer links are made “*between the Bill of Rights and the actual goals of discipline*”.

### 5.2.5 Knowledge contestation

From the interviews with teachers it was clear that teaching in classrooms no longer has monopoly over the dispensing of knowledge. Many teachers in rural areas fear the ways in which the Internet has revolutionised modes of knowledge transmission. Many agonise that learners can learn more from social media than they do from them as teachers, while others worry that learners tend to treat what they see and hear from social networks as true and real. For many teachers, discipline in classrooms then also becomes a contestation over knowledge and who controls it. Chad (Sakhisizwe) noted the role of social media as follows:

*“The fact that our kids are forever glued to their cell phones is an unsettling reality that we cannot wish away. Subconsciously these kids are assimilating the wayward information that is dispensed by the Internet. You can judge by the SMS slang they use in their formal written work. All of this exercises an influence in disorienting our children. We as teachers, as well as parents, no longer have control over what knowledge is accessible to our kids. You shudder to think about what kind of sadistic visuals these kids are exposed to on a daily basis.”*

Teachers expressed concern that their professional power to dispense knowledge has been threatened at the very time that they have lost other forms of power in the classroom (with learners exercising their rights) and that these have jointly diluted their authority. They argued that this has also undermined the knowledge embodied in textbooks as authentic texts and made it difficult to convince learners to always abide by their disciplinary protocols.

Discipline in the classroom, for many teachers, is thus firmly bound up in contests over a host of other important materialities. Having said that, teachers noted that this in no way suggested that they were against new forms of knowledge making:

*“Not necessarily. To say to them ‘keep away from this’, is actually stirring their curiosity about the bizarre world of the Internet. We must accept that these things are here to stay and the Internet has advantages and disadvantages. I wouldn’t like us to go back to the stone-age. We need to preserve much of the old and be open minded enough to exploit the benefits of the new. I mean, let’s*



*admit it, we all can be empowered by the Internet if this medium is used prudently.”*

### **5.3 CONCLUSION**

The findings presented in this chapter showed different ways in which discipline, power, and knowledge interface in participant schools. Teachers often think that referring to values of Ubuntu help to better describe learners that do not behave or that do not follow the desired rules of a democratic society. This, it has been shown, clearly depends on the personal histories of teachers, as well as their political affiliations. It is also contingent on the location and seniority of teachers in schools, and the kinds of power contests they have to participate in. In that respect, many often display clear generational gaps amongst themselves (as young and older teachers) and between them and learners with regard to what they think should serve as binding values for all. Older teachers tend to be more conservative and resistant to new disciplinary methodologies, while younger teachers often recognise youthful exuberance and the new world that learners are growing up in as challenges and not hindrances. Varying interpretations of learner misconduct (and what they are doing) also play a huge role in what kinds of disciplinary strategies are employed at schools, with teachers invariably locked in a variety of power struggles that create complex networks of power, surveillance, and knowledge. This is further discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### ANALYSIS

#### 6.1 BEYOND PHYSICAL PUNISHMENT

The previous chapter identified key themes running through the research on teachers and discipline in three Eastern Cape schools. It was noted that the banning of corporal punishment thrust teachers into a professional wilderness. Notably, according to teachers in one rural context, the banning of corporal punishment also jettisoned many traditional (meaning both ‘older’ and cultural) methods of control in favour of more modern concepts grounded in human rights. In such environments, teachers confess to being uncertain about the efficacy of new methods – especially in the context of rural schooling.

Indeed, the research findings show that teachers in the region of Butterworth, Eastern Cape, are sceptical of government-sanctioned alternatives to corporal punishment and resultant disciplinary improprieties that hinder teaching and learning projects (Mohapi, 2014). Despite the promulgation of a variety of alternatives to corporal punishment (ATCP) by the Department of Education (DoE), many teachers remain unconvinced and disenchanted, describing “the ATCP strategy as ineffective, inadequate, and a waste of time” (Moyo, Khewu & Bayaga, 2014). In essence, teachers seem to be only interested in alternatives that inflict the same sting as corporal punishment, not the “trivial alternatives advocated by the ATCP strategy” (Moyo *et al.*, 2014).

The research findings and attached discussions also highlight the importance of learner rights in current debates about school discipline. Noting that learners have become more conscious and assertive of their rights and liberties (Mattes, 2011), teachers have since sought to replace physical punishments with improvised discursive substitutes aimed at promoting learner confidence, performance, and participation. Although more muted and benign, these substitutes are intended to supplant the old adversarial spectacles of corporal punishment with relationships of engagement that bind all parties to common practices and agreements. As such, teachers have been forced to relinquish their monopoly of disciplinary practices in the classroom and to embrace a power-sharing pact (which binds teachers, parents, and learners) conferred by the constitutional democracy.

Furthermore, as learners are represented in school governing bodies (SGBs) through elected Representative Council of Learners members – as per the provisions of SASA (Section 8) –

teachers no longer have full authority over all learners and are obliged to consult with them with regard to disciplinary matters. As such, constitutional principles have become the guiding light for new codes of ethics that govern teacher professionalism, meaning that teachers can no longer call on their locally and contextually honed insights to frame their practices or thinking. Teachers currently owe sole allegiance to a plethora of disciplinary regulations that are often prescriptive and invariably bureaucratic (Wilkins *et al.*, 2009). Indeed, in the current period, relationships between discipline and the law in contemporary South Africa have become the most pressing and urgent matters that schools engage with.

In this study, given what teachers stated about discipline in their classrooms in the Eastern Cape, the research findings conclude that the disciplinary characters of Sakhisizwe, Zamokuhle, and Nkululeko are bound and rooted within contestations over historical and contemporary discourses on discipline and power. This phenomenon is consistent with the argument of John (2012), who reports that school cultures over long periods provide momentum that “unconsciously reinforces the old”, and is also “reinforced” by how everyone in the school engages with them. It is also consistent with other discreet disciplinary machineries in countries elsewhere that reveal how registers of absentees, lists of noise-makers, and the use of class monitors, place learners under constant surveillance and steadfastly keep teachers informed of their doings (Foucault, 1977:77).

More importantly perhaps, the research findings from the Eastern Cape display how ideologies are expressed through languages of knowledge generation and class struggle. Cannella and Lincoln (2015) assert that language often gives “form” to ideologies and also “prompts” actions. Language and its discourses are thus deeply complicit in power relations and class struggles within schools. But contrary to claims that current South African disciplinary protocols emphasise the use of linguistic and discursive modalities to resolve discipline-related problems, teachers prefer using particular vocabularies as part of disciplinary discourses in order to exclude, confine, brand, and reintegrate learners in the classroom. Their discursive registries are often quite paradoxical and rely on terminologies that generate particular realities for their learners.

This linguistic approach by teachers is also partly visible in their reluctance to communicate with parents, or to provoke conflict with them. Using a discursive register that attempts to protect their professional integrity and personas, teachers tend to be wary of collaborating with parents in order to find disciplinary solutions in the contemporary period. They both fear parents – with many parents expecting them to use physical forms of punishment – and worry

about official repercussions and rebukes should they decide to employ physical reprimands, believing that this will place them in even more visible and vulnerable spaces and undermine their positions in schools.

That does not mean that teachers have stopped consulting parents, or ceased to conjure up alternatives to physical punishment to take control of their classrooms. Many teachers have ventured into discursive domains in which discipline is a product of healthy bargaining among role players (teachers, parents, and learners) – adding to a mixed bag of disciplinary experiences in schools.

In very many cases, however, teachers still seem quite willing to risk legal action at times when they believe there are no other workable alternatives to ongoing violence in their schools and communities (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010). Learner recourse to the courts may have curbed the use of corporal punishment in schools since 1994; notwithstanding reports of increases in child abuse since 1994, according to the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2012), but teachers continue to believe that big displays or graphic spectacles of disciplinary action are necessary if misconduct in schools is to be addressed and eliminated. They seem well aware that discipline is a social process that operates beyond the realm of the school and that it has implications for the achievement of larger societal ambitions.

Indeed, in the unfamiliar terrain into which they have been inscribed, teachers appear uncertain about what works and what does not. Their approaches remain tentative and there is a sense amongst them that the state has failed to offer viable alternatives to corporal punishment. New practices manifest themselves as exclusion from class, school detention, and at times dubious measures like having to stand on one leg in the classroom corner, but in many school settings such measures are often laughed at, and fail to meet their purposes, due to already weak lines of authority.

Similarly, while teachers can no longer summarily mete out any forms of punishment without following due processes according to school codes of conduct (which most schools do not know how to initiate), teachers complain that state alternatives do not lead to positive results in their schools.

This study provides insights that show that new disciplinary dispensations not only challenge teacher reflections on their personal experiences and practices of discipline, but also their ways of dealing with learner misconduct. Available literature also offers interesting viewpoints of

the nexus that connects discipline, power, and knowledge for each of them, and how they, as teachers, think about it.

In this regard, a variety of theories of social regulation show that state interventions conceived in relation to how to best organise discipline in classrooms tend to invariably use language registers that emphasise control, care, and belonging. Such theories recommend policies and teacher practices that build on forms of solidarity in the classroom and that use ‘peer pressure’ and languages of ‘shaming’ to discourage misconduct. For example, Hirschi’s (1969) theory of delinquency cautions that any lack of goodwill or social bonds between teachers and learners could predispose different ‘vulnerable’ learners to unacceptable behaviours. Where bonds are absent, however, the best way to keep learners in place would be to remind (shame) them that when they transgress, they are actually letting their classmates down (and not their teachers). These are particularly important in geographical areas where there are strong cultural and intergenerational bonds (as in rural Eastern Cape). Theories of social regulation depend on teachers and learners, in such contexts, to develop formidable partnerships in their schools as ways of discouraging delinquent behaviour.

Theories of social regulation also freely acknowledge that, as Outhwaite (2003:233) asserts, “it is in the nature of social encounters that mutually opposed gods and demons always compete for our allegiance”. As such, as much as there needs to be a focus on building strong bonds of friendship within schools, it is also presumed that when learners feel alienated from school programmes, they will naturally become involved in acts of misconduct (as noted by teachers at Zamokuhle that there was rampant drug trafficking). Discursive languages that are cautious from the outset about learners ‘feeling they have nothing to lose’ and that thus put themselves at risk of harsh disciplinary sanctions, are often more concerned about order and obedience than about building bonds of solidarity amongst learners.

Power is applied in such situations in subtle, but also quite direct, ways. Teachers, for instance, deliberately use their powers to generate particular behaviours, as Sindiswa (Zamokuhle) noted below:

*“One time I was managing the late-coming of learners ... so those learners who came late, I collected all of them and said they must queue next to the queues of the learners who were on time for the prayers. They honoured the assembly up to the end. And when the assembly was finished, I called them and said, ‘Have you seen that you were separated from other learners [do you know] why?’*

*Their answer was, 'It was because we are late, teacher.' And I said, 'If you continue to do this, you will always pray separately from others.' Those learners involved never came late to school again. So I felt that the punishment I did to them was successful."*

While Sindiswa (Zamokuhle) decided to use a disciplinary strategy that sought to bring learners back 'into the fold' by getting them to acknowledge wrongdoing and the resultant consequences (Bray *et al.*, 2010), her intentions were also to morally guide the learners and enforce her authority on them. She believed that it was necessary to use a particular language and disciplinary action on the learners, given that they were at an age where they were especially receptive to being alienated from their peers. As such, the language registers used by her and other teachers in classrooms in the Eastern Cape often seek to 'marry and carry' a number of different messages – of both hope and despair.

Sindiswa (Zamokuhle) noted, however, that in the new dispensation, there simply remains too much confusion, contradiction, and frustration about what is being sought through new disciplinary practices, and what teachers are meant to achieve. That is why, Sindiswa (Zamokuhle) conceded, if given the opportunity she would not try to 'fix learners anymore':

*"It is so difficult – very, very difficult – and for myself I always ask why am I not 50 and above so that I take my package and just sit at home."*

The latter sentiment highlights two outcomes that current disciplinary practices in schools need to always be aware of and address. These are:

- the tide of disgruntled educators that leave teaching because they are not protected by policy, and because of high levels of indiscipline in class; and
- the need to develop serviceable approaches to discipline that allow teaching and learning projects to proceed successfully.

The discussion has so far presented some of the issues posed by teachers relating to discipline, power, and knowledge. It now turns to emerging themes within the findings, and analyses the various discursive threads that constitute the disciplinary nexus within three rural Eastern Cape schools.

## **6.2 CROSS-CUTTING THEMES**

The themes discussed in the previous chapter showed the relationships between power (internally in schools and externally at the different levels of governance), intergenerational

differences, and understandings of both established and new disciplinary practices in schools. This discussion showed the different actors and factors that influence how discipline functions in different schools and, moreover, how teachers' own experiences of punishment in their own schooling, either encourages or deters them from using corporal punishment in their own classrooms. This occurs against the backdrop of a constitution rooted in human rights and policies that outlaw corporal punishment.

The following sections reflect on some of these issues as they pertain to localised experiences of discipline, power, and knowledge, and how they relate to the literature informing the study. Four cross-cutting themes were identified:

- Discipline and policy;
- Discipline as correcting personal and community pathologies, and the Department as passive observer;
- Discipline as emotional blackmail; and
- Discipline as the power of persuasion.

These are further discussed below.

### **6.2.1 Discipline and policy**

While this study cannot, with any confidence, pronounce on the question of how discipline is tied to understandings of citizenship in South Africa, it is necessary to touch on how certain aspects of citizenship, belonging, and economic productivity as it emerged from discussions with participants, are bound up in a disciplinary discourse.

A key element that emerged from the research findings, for example, was the close connections that are made when it comes to discussing discipline between learners as economic actors and how this is tied to issues of democracy, proper conduct, and what it means to be South African.

In this understanding, “learners don’t have the right to enjoy unfettered democratic participation in civil society” (Waghid & Davids, 2013) but rather need to find ways of expressing their sense of belonging and commonality as part of their individual contributions to the economy and to the nation. In that regard, discipline has a political function.

Crucially, its discursive power starts with the Constitution (and then other national policies) and how these frame the lives of South African citizens. It could be argued that the Constitution reinforces a particular form of violence and transgression in how it promulgates the concept of

justice in South Africa, and who has access to it. For in the protection thereof, (constitutional) institutions are often excused for the kinds of stern measures they take to maintain law and order, and the violence they need to commit in order to protect the sanctity of institutions and to counter the violence committed by those that do not regard themselves as ‘citizens’, are vehemently defended. This kind of mentality has the effect of creating two kinds of scenarios in classrooms:

- Firstly, it can create a view of the world that places the needs of the state and the economy above the interests of its citizens. In this the desperation of marginalised learners is largely ignored.
- Secondly, it provides an approach to human rights and citizenship that binds teachers and learners to a particular national vision.

In the first scenario, what was common in the three schools that participated in the study was that they were all previously disadvantaged schools (under apartheid) and were situated in a largely rural economy in the Eastern Cape that had high rates of unemployment. The resounding sentiment captured by the interviews is that learners in these schools are very disillusioned about their future prospects, and do not see much point in either attending schools or abiding by the rules of the school or those of communities around them. To counter this, there is a heightened consciousness amongst teachers that they urgently need to find ways of better fitting their schools into the national social landscape. Often, they concede that this is an impossible task. In this, as teachers they give in, along with their learners, to a narrative of disillusionment that constructs itself around external factors in their lives and within the internal helplessness that accompanies this.

In many cases, teachers do what they can do because that is what they are expected to do, and show very little zeal or genuine commitment to helping learners. In essence, they do not believe that they can really change the conditions of learners – certainly not in meaningful ways. Their professional malaise is also tied to their frustrations with weak institutional conditions, which they view as a consequence of a disinterested government or local districts, and because of largely uncooperative learners. For teachers in these situations, the ideal world that the Constitution constantly alludes to – where learners and citizens dream about and pursue their ambitions – has largely eluded them. Their view of discipline in this scenario is thus not one that seeks to instil in learners ordering that will make their lives better, but rather one where teachers need to sanction learners in order to keep control of overwhelming living situations.



Many of them see their roles in the classroom as them simply being responsible for keeping learners in class and making them conform to the routine structure of the school.

In the second scenario, teachers buy into a particular discourse of learner performance and wellbeing that is firmly tied to concepts like human rights and citizenship. In their struggles with the concept of discipline in their classrooms, many teachers are torn between their constitutional obligations to protect and uphold the rights and interests of learners at all times and the mandates of their schools, and indeed many parents, where they are expected to pass on to learners a firm sense of how they need to operate in everyday life.

On the one hand, the Constitution dictates that teachers be accountable and transparent about what they do and why they do it according to the precepts of human rights (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010; Kapueja, 2014). The Constitution advocates a human rights perspective that places enormous value on dignity and respect and disavows violent means of securing good conduct amongst learners. Many teachers have sought ways of sanctioning that adheres to these requirements.

On the other hand, sentiments like “things are out of control” often place teachers at odds with the demands of parents, fellow staff members, communities, and other stakeholders, that expect them to instil values that perpetuate the status quo.

Indeed, what seemed clear from the study’s findings was that while teachers are keen to bolster the human rights of South Africans secured since 1994, they are less keen to recognise the rights, aspirations, and personal experiences of learners in the classrooms. For many of them, the political advances since 1994 do not extend to learners in the ways learners think these do, especially in classroom spaces where they feel they have lost control. Most teachers in the study thought that learners should be physically reprimanded as a way of keeping them ‘in line’, and did not believe that these kinds of actions intruded on learners’ human rights or put learners’ aspirations and experiences at risk (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2014:13).

Yet, Podsiadlik (2014) observes that:

“[w]hen classroom discourse relies primarily on teacher-generated demands, commands, and compliance, a mutually free and communicative spirit is stifled. Verbal communication that hinges on issues of power and control destroys the free exchange of thoughts and ideas”.

For the study it was found that it is in how education policy discourse is framed in South Africa, and its location of South African citizenship within the nexus of school, jobs, and healthy

living, that perhaps gives teachers the greatest power to decide what is ‘good’ or ‘bad’ for learners, and use the necessary discursive means in order to do so.

It is argued that, as embedded in South Africa’s National Development Plan (NDP), current disciplinary policy visions take firm shape and form in how teachers and learners across the country commit to a particular understanding of a future society. The development of a particular language and vocabulary of what constitutes a good or bad learner (in relation to the economy and their contribution as workers and good citizens) thereafter operates *externally* by putting pressure on teachers in classrooms to deliver on their responsibilities for all learners to perform, and *internally* by making teachers believe that what they are doing when they sanction and differentiate learners is in the national interest.

This ultimately constitutes an ideological struggle for what it means to be a citizen in South Africa (Fisher & Larkin, 2010), and as such is more than about differentiating between right and wrong. Rather, it is about how best to secure the rights and aspirations of the greater population of learners within the “particular constraints of a discourse of belonging” (Millei *et al.*, 2010).

At the theoretical level, the research findings in the three schools with regard to constitutional matters revealed a conflation of discipline, power, and knowledge that create, as Oakeshot aptly put it, “a whole of interlocking meanings that constantly establish and interpret one another” (cited by Peters, 2010:109). In that regard, discipline serves as a multi-layered vehicle that couples issues of power to that of knowledge in ways that remind all South Africans about the political project and what is at stake if order is not maintained. Power manifests in ways that does not need learners to witness violence or desist from transgression, but rather consistently adopt or adhere to a discursive language that holds particular views about individual ‘correct’ behaviour and values. The inculcation of values, mores, and patterns of behaviour in schools thus constitutes knowledge that is shared and legitimated by an institutional landscape that entrenches particular power dynamics, and that attempts to make learners consent to particular understandings of the national project.

### **6.2.2 Discipline as correcting personal and community pathologies: The state as passive observer**

It was found in the study that discipline in the three schools in the Eastern Cape is firmly tied to issues of correction. In each of the schools, teachers regarded disciplinary sanctions and the establishment of codes of conduct as the primary means of correcting errant learners. In this,

they have usurped a language of pathology that admits to a close symbiotic relationship between the ailments of surrounding communities and what goes on in the schools. It is assumed that because there is a regular spill-over into schools of the social problems that afflict communities around the three schools, that a direct link can be made between the pathologies of criminals or law-breaking community members and the misconduct or disobedience of school learners. Greater discipline within classrooms, it is felt, would make learners in schools both the beneficiaries of acceptable societal norms and values as well as key contributors to the refinement of those societal norms and values when they re-enter their communities. This, many claim, adds to a better fabric of society.

There was a sense from the research findings that teachers were quite content (and happy) with learners that show a propensity for ‘uncritical obedience’ towards elders, especially in rural contexts where traditional values and customs are revered. Most teachers displayed great antagonism towards learners who “talk back”, a stance they claim is rooted in cultural notions of respect for adults – where lack of respect is regarded as “*a cancer that is eating away at the moral fibre of our society*” (Lindelani, Nkululeko).

A distinctive finding from the study of the three schools was that schools often combine two types of belief systems or discourses to make sense, and take control, of their challenges in rural areas, and to hold themselves accountable to the tenets of the South African Schools Act (SASA), which require the establishment of “a disciplined and purposeful school environment dedicated to the improvement and maintenance of the quality of the learning process”.

The first belief system or discourse is a form of ‘taking the blame’ for the social dysfunction that lay within their surrounding communities. Instead of challenging the dominant perceptions of their communities and schools, teachers often reinforce stereotypes that pathologise their learners and that take for granted that unless learners are regularly sanctioned and ‘kept in line’, that they will ‘naturally transgress’. The second belief system or discourse relapses to upholding traditional values and a dependence on the norms of ‘obedience to adults’ and that of ‘silent following’. In doing so, schools often revert to older forms of thinking and living that they feel could ‘rescue’ them from the deprivations and depravities of modern society.

A consequence of the above discourses is that it shifts responsibility away from the central government to address the social qualms of different communities to individual schools, and move them onto individual learners and teachers. In this way, disciplinary technologies are

transferred from a state of regulation to teacher and learner self-restraint and self-mutilation (Rabinow, 1984).

*“The department brings pressure to bear on us without regard for the hardships that we have to endure. We are working under duress. Those insensitive education bosses want us to perform no matter what”* (Lindelani, Nkululeko).

Discussions about disciplinary discourses in each of the three schools revealed that the schools rarely turn to districts or provincial departments to assist them with the sanctioning of learners. Many teachers feel that as the provincial department does not assume any direct responsibility for what is happening in the individual schools, it is up to them to take control of how they deal with discipline. On the one hand, this devolution of powers to SGBs means that the provincial department is absolved from blame should things go wrong. On the other hand, it gives schools and teachers (with the support of parents) greater powers and responsibility to sanction learners in discreet (but spectral) ways.

Ironically, with disciplinary power and authority shifting from the state to local schools, most teachers in the three schools expressed a complete sense of powerlessness and hopelessness. They observed that in shifting the onus of disciplining learners onto them and expecting them also to achieve a variety of desired learner performance outcomes, the state is not empowering them but rather abandoning them. Their reasoning is that at the very time that the state needs to assist teachers and learners, in rural contexts like those of Butterworth in the Eastern Cape, that it has instead ‘passed the buck’ and left them to flounder. For them, SGBs do not have the skills to draw up effective codes of conduct by which to discipline learners, nor the resources or provincial support to deal with transgressors that need to be sanctioned. Many teachers noted that rural schools are “left to rot” because learners there mostly cannot contribute to the economy. By giving them legal power, schools and teachers are essentially taking responsibility for their further demise. Which is why, teachers mused, they often turned to traditional customs and to older forms of physical sanction.

The research findings suggest that in many instances the disciplinary question is determined by the many contradictions that lay within decentralisation debates. Power over, and knowledge about, society is disbursed through disciplinary mechanisms that blend languages of personal (local) responsibility to that of national civic duty. In so doing, discipline carries the discursive authority to *make* both teachers and learners at the local level accountable to

each other and to local communities. This kind of approach also allows the state to remain a ‘silent partner’ in the sanctioning and regulation of learners in all public schools.

In South Africa, schools and teachers are also held accountable for what happens in their schools (and for the loss of discipline) by bodies such as the DBE, the South African Council of Educators (SACE), provincial departments, local districts, and SGBs. Each of these bodies has a variety of policies that they expect teachers and learners to adhere to. Notably, with each of these national and local bodies, the different policies seem to have a common discourse that frames how discipline is understood, and how discipline should be applied.

As Swartbooi (Zamokuhle) noted: *“Our school tames the barbaric instincts of our learners and corrects the failures of our parents to appropriately discipline the learners”*. For many teachers the lack of discipline of learners can be attributed to the poverty and illiteracy that pervade their communities. They regularly argue that as indiscipline worsens, poverty contributes even further to lower economic prospects. The consequence of this usurpation of a language of errant behaviour in relation to unemployment, poverty, sustainable living, and school performance is that the concept of discipline achieves a level of power within society that make learners in rural schools like Butterworth believe that they are themselves responsible for their ill-fated lives, as well as expecting them to find a way out of their hopelessness. It is what Foucault has referred to as the transfer of “the problem of discipline” to the individual body (Rabinow, 1984) – to communities, to local schools, and to teachers and learners (as sites of correction).

In that regard, parents are seen as hindrances to disciplinary protocols, policies, and practices. This means that workable behavioural management solutions within schools like the three schools in the Eastern Cape will always remain extremely elusive.

This is so because part of the problem of discipline in South Africa, according to Morrell (2001), is that new disciplinary policies have to simultaneously compete with older historical traditions, practices, and control mechanisms (that themselves eroded trust amongst teachers and learners over a long period of time) in similar school contexts. This muddled collapsing of ‘old and new’ confuses teachers and strips their new chosen disciplinary processes of the legitimacy they require.

### 6.2.3 Discipline and emotive injunctions

Many teachers acknowledge that they often appeal to learner emotions, where they call them to order and obedience via a sense of obligation and guilt. It is a type of persuasion that Foucault (1977) observes is very effective in getting citizens to “emotionally wear” the scars and shame of their indiscretions on their bodies in everyday living. He cautions that the purpose of such an approach is to ensure “the production of discipline” within learners and is not geared towards helping learners explore or learn from their mistakes. Such emotive injunctions stifle learner agency and learner creativity, and disapprove of risk taking and senses of adventure in school. It is an approach that is enormously damaging to learners as they are groomed to be overwhelmed by guilt when they deviate from expected disciplinary etiquettes and do not subscribe to the values and principles espoused by schools and teachers.

This can occur in a variety of ways. It can happen in ways where teachers tell learners when they transgress that they have ‘let down their parents or their communities’ and they then shame them publicly by reminding them of all the people they have hurt. Or it can occur in more subtle and unobtrusive approaches, such as when Mizamo (Sakhisizwe) noted when asked about how he utilised discipline to gain power and assert knowledge in the classroom:

*“I cannot claim to be an expert in these things. But being a Life Orientation teacher I think ... has made me a much more caring person and as a result I am much more tolerant in my approach on matters of discipline. To maintain discipline in my class, I’ve learned the importance of inspiring learners to want to be someone tomorrow. In my experience I found out that if you as a teacher can keep that light shining in front of the learner, you’ll be able to align his behaviour with his career ambitions without necessarily beating him or being confrontational etcetera. If, for example, a learner has expressed his wish to be a doctor, what I do is to find out from him what he thinks is the typical behaviour of a doctor. When he goes astray, I will then courteously remind him: ‘That’s not how a doctor is supposed to behave’ or ‘That’s not how a policeman is supposed to behave’. So when you inculcate that mindset in them in early years, you sort of want them to focus on their dreams without being distracted by worthless pursuits.”*

What Mizamo (Sakhisizwe) was actually doing was to organise learners in their everyday context and to divide learners according to practices, training, ambitions, and the norms of the

occupation that they identified they would pursue. Unaware of the emotional investments that these hold for the different learners, Mizamo partly nullified their agency by bringing together their main everyday challenges to focus on the intersection of discourse, discipline, and power (Barker, 2002).

#### 6.2.4 Discipline as a form of persuasion

Teachers also acknowledged that there are productive ways of using discipline to break down miscommunication between teachers and learners and that allow them to reach to each other as ‘equals’. Chichi (Nkululeko) observed a situation where she found common ground with learners in ways that allowed them to hereafter forge ahead in harmonious social encounters.

*“You know when an elephant is in the room, you can obviously sense its presence but you may have to figure out what it is up to. I cannot say precisely what this learner did to me but whatever it was, he succeeded in annoying me big time. The way he carried himself, his mannerisms, the grotesque way he answered questions ... everything about him was irritating. I tried to ignore him but that did not help. Instead, it actually won him sympathisers. I then decided to swallow my pride and co-opted him onto the RCL. I assigned him small responsibilities which he carried out clumsily but enthusiastically. Then one day I was coincidentally in the same taxi with him and he was seated next to me for the whole hour-long journey. It was in this journey that it finally dawned on me as I spoke to him that the boy that I had despised so much was so vulnerable because of his pitiful circumstances. From that time onwards, we were able to strike a better rapport in class.”*

In another incident, Sindiswa (Zamokuhle) reflected that persuading learners through productive and respectful encounters often won them over to the disciplinary aims of ‘teachers who care’:

*“You have those teachers that are noticeably aloof and detached and you also have those that are overly flirtatious with learners. I think when relating with learners, you must strike some sort of a balance. Maybe I’m saying this because, as a student, I hated treatment that undermined my dignity. You’ll find out that students lean more towards a certain teacher whom they idolise and hold with the highest esteem.”*

Cialdini (2007) notes that there are six social persuasion techniques that allow people to convince others to make decisions. These include reciprocity, scarcity, authority, consistency, liking, and consensus, and are mechanisms of disciplinary power. The first, reciprocity, is when individuals act on behalf of another and in so doing making that person feel obliged to return a favour, much like what happened in an earlier incident described by Sindiswa (Zamokuhle). In actions where teachers or learners freely volunteer to assist, the expectation normally is to receive the same or even greater rewards in return. As such, reciprocity operates as a disciplinary mechanism, in so far as it operates without force or coercion while maintaining a level of hierarchical power between teachers and learners.

Thereafter it is the social interaction between teachers and learners that monitors both their behaviours and generates the ‘standards’ or ‘normalised judgements’ by which they operate. If the action of the teacher, for example, is not what the learner expects, the learner will ‘penalise’ the teacher by not ‘playing along’ or being obedient. If the teacher acts in ways that please learners, they may act generously and abide by what is expected of them. The ‘pleasing’ behaviour then is what represents the main motivation for change, as well as the guideline for the ‘new normalised standard’ in the classroom.

As such, reciprocity can normalise the actions and judgments of teachers and learners in accordance with the law, and the attached regulations. This is what supposedly makes everyone the same, and which categorises learners as outliers when they do not follow normalised conventions. It is what discourages the upholding of the standard of the law when learners participate in negative actions, and get others to reciprocate with good actions when learners follow the rules. The power of reciprocity as a disciplinary mechanism is that it creates a hierarchy of power that govern their actions. In different ways, enactments associated with reciprocity also play themselves out in similar ways with regard to other persuasive techniques such as scarcity, authority, consistency, liking, and consensus.



## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSION

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

This study explored the relationship between discipline, power, and knowledge in three rural schools in the Eastern Cape. It illustrated contesting perspectives of teachers struggling to resolve their own experiences of physical punishment and how they practised this through their own disciplinary methodologies. They noted that disciplinary techniques of the past have been challenged by the new constitutional order, and continues to shape the relationship between school, society, and history and the continuities these leave in their practices. Teachers responded to the following research questions:

- 1) What do teachers think about school discipline?
- 2) How does the human rights culture impact power relations between teachers and learners, and between a learner and his or her peers?
- 3) How are teachers coping with the new disciplinary code of ethics that is grounded on constitutional values?
- 4) How do teachers use power and knowledge to negotiate their way through the teaching and learning space?

The research utilised group and individual interviews and a cross-disciplinary literature review to respond to the research questions. Interviews were often conducted in a mixture of English and isiXhosa, and findings were translated to ensure full disclosure. The findings show that divisions across age, culture, experience, and political attitudes invariably temper understandings and expectations of discipline, with teachers often subject to the same disciplinary techniques that they originally played a part in creating. A complex network of disciplinary relations circulated in each participant school, yet with notable similarities.

This chapter draws the thesis to a close by articulating the main points of interest arising from the research, and citing their importance for future research and concerns about disciplinary practice. Throughout the chapter, possible new avenues for research are flagged that may contribute to better understandings of links between discipline, power, and knowledge as pertaining to South African schools.

## 7.2 MAIN POINTS DERIVING FROM THE RESEARCH

The research findings discussed the results of the empirical work conducted at the three sites. It found that teachers were generally locked in contestation across the new policy landscape and that this affected the disciplinary avenues available to them and those they chose to utilise. Many of them suggested that policy conditions were unfavourable when applied in their schools and that these generally disadvantaged them and their teaching. This included the focus on human rights as encapsulated in the Constitution, which some felt afforded learners too much power and often led to them acting with impunity. The findings highlighted that teachers encountered these challenges in the context of attempting to maintain order and to get learners to invest in their own education. Values of Ubuntu were often juxtaposed with existing discourses of disciplinary sanction.

What the analysis proposes is that the laws and policies framing discipline and human rights in education present new risks and responsibilities to teachers. Teachers report having to tread a careful path between national norms and regulations, school codes of conduct, the external power of SGBs and parents, the approaches utilised by principals in enforcing discipline, teacher frustration with indiscipline in their classrooms, and teacher agency in extracting behaviour in class that encourages learning.

Teachers in the three schools noted an uneasy relationship between human rights, discipline, and traditional customs in the above regard. They observe that deference to the ‘elders’ and to the norms of local communities means that teachers struggle in their classrooms to alert learners to the expectations of new legislation, or insert within their practices ways of practising discipline that are always respectful and just. By constantly reminding learners that indiscipline is not only unlawful but a breach with tradition and disrespectful to the elders, disciplinary practices that weld ‘old and new’ send out mixed signals to learners about what the objectives of disciplinary sanctions are.

On the other hand, teachers freely acknowledge that in those situations where discipline is practised in more respectful ways, learners are more engaging and exuberant in the classroom. They describe this mainly as a generational conflict between ‘old ways’ and ‘new social prescriptions’, between centuries-old traditions and the promises and protections of the new Constitution – but where national authority supersedes the dictates of the local authority. Teachers noted that in such situations teachers and learners come to shared agreements through negotiation and discussion, and are able to ensure that local values and traditions actually assist

teachers in developing disciplinary practices that treasure discourses of human rights. Under certain conditions, disciplinary practices that attempt to imbibe local values (and not dismiss them) and that stay true to constitutional regulations, highlight the benefits of compromise and common agreement and their contribution to good classroom management.

Which is not to suggest that many traditional customs do not often contradict the norms of human rights. In some cases, it was found that traditional beliefs that are masculinist and chauvinistic often undermine agreed-upon disciplinary practices, and make them less palatable. Often, both community members and teachers practise these beliefs, making gender highly visible in teacher attitudes towards culture, tradition, discipline, and expected learner conduct. Paradoxically, they do so within a culture of and adherence to human rights.

And yet, while learners are aware that they have rights and that they can report mistreatment by teachers (Maphosa & Shumba, 2010), parents or school management, along with individual teachers, seem to nevertheless continue to encourage the use of physical punishment. In this, their practice is helped considerably both by the remoteness of rural communities and pervasiveness of unemployment and dysfunction in rural areas. Teachers get away with physical punishment because they are not easily visible to the different higher authorities, but also because they are able to convince learners that physical punishment is good for them and will help them learn skills that can lift them out of poverty and hopelessness.

These situations were found to profoundly influence learner disillusionment with the educational project in rural areas, as well as the possibilities they offer. Some teachers held similar thoughts of disillusionment and have come to view their work as simple caretaking or babysitting.

In relation to the above, Foucault reminds that discourses have the power to shape attitudes, gate-keep, and isolate deviance, giving teachers the power to condemn learners to a cycle of trouble through identifying them as internally deficient, immoral, weak, or criminal (Rabinow, 1984). It also gives them the power to define and impose certain definitions of indiscretion that create distinction and division, and that define ‘good’ and ‘bad’ learners (Rabinow, 1984). Discourses of discipline further have the capacity to create ‘profiles’ for certain learners and to impose these on their experiences during their schooling careers.

In that respect, underneath the above analytical threads lays a contradictory relationship between discipline and social change. When teachers blame contemporary circumstances for the confusion and uncertainty that determine their disciplinary practices, the norm is to

complain that educational authorities do not sufficiently support schools to maintain order and that the banning of physical punishment and ineffective alternatives to corporal punishment together erode their authority even further.

In that regard, teachers are conflicted by their past experiences and by their current practices, and often wonder aloud whether their personal experiences of pain were really as damaging as they previously thought. In relating their own different experiences of corporal punishment, many teachers recorded their internal strife in attempting to adhere to conduct that is expected of them under the new dispensation, but tempered by personal views and previous experiences of physical sanction.

These conflicts, alongside poor state support in helping teachers adapt to new disciplinary regimes, are what impact on the confidence of teachers to discipline, as well as to teach in meaningful ways. The implications of these points are further discussed in the following section.

### **7.3 POLICY AND PRACTICE: IMPLICATIONS**

School discipline and learner conduct are deemed crucial to the educational project. Charles (2005) asserts that when teachers are able to get learners to behave, there is a higher probability that the learners will (more) successfully work through the curriculum and use their time efficiently. The broad aims of SASA (1996) are to position learners in ways that allow them to become active and conscientious citizens, making discipline a central dimension of schooling and a key function of school management. This is made ever more evident when power and local authority are devolved down to the school, and where teachers are deemed responsible for resolving many of the external social ills that affect school communities as well as school performance.

Teachers find it difficult, however, to develop new, effective, or relevant disciplinary techniques. They find it impossible to resolve the effects of problems like drug dealing, school fights, sexual improprieties, alcohol abuse, or the impact family issues have on school performance and learner experiences. They struggle with the above mainly because that is not the function of teachers and rather are being left to negotiate their penetration into school life on an everyday basis. Many teachers in the study observed that they were left bewildered on a daily basis by the sheer onslaught of social problems on their teaching, and feel stranded in a wilderness from which there is no salvation or survival. Their sense of alienation and isolation is only equalled by their feelings of total helplessness and defeat.

This study shows that teachers in hard-to-teach and remote schools, in particular, need specific support to deal with the interlocking challenges of poverty, isolation, unemployment, despair, scarce resources, and inadequate skills.

Expanding access to social workers and personal and guidance counsellors in rural and ‘difficult’ schools needs particular attention, and encoding this in policy at regular intervals is a serious requirement. This would ease the personal and emotional labour expectations placed on teachers. Most teachers know, however, that these services or supports will not be provided, even though the provision of specialised care would enable a more efficient and positive functioning of school disciplinary apparatuses. Chichi (Zamokuhle), for example proposed that disciplinary techniques should become more individualised as a way to offset school level inability to resolve indiscipline. She argued that teachers are able to gain better insights in the application of human rights cultures in schools when they are part of a broader community of disciplinary professionals (such as social workers).

Teachers in the study were concerned that resources that are provided to underprivileged schools that come without symbiotic financial and care support will instead further undermine the sense of teacher self-worth in the classroom. They argued that teachers were distrustful not only because of what many of them experienced in the past (state oppression), but also because the state no longer seemed interested in resolving the social problems that plague their schools and classrooms.

Building trust within schools is thus fundamental to any disciplinary process being acceptable or successful, especially if those processes attempt to marry cultural issues and legal requirements when disciplining learners. While historical knowledge and discourses affect how learners, parents, and teachers meet and contest with one another within the school’s disciplinary nexus, it is within alternative policies that change would be possible – especially if teachers are given support and recourse to hold learners accountable to codes of conduct and are also able to help learner agency, and confer responsibility on learners at age-appropriate levels.

At the discursive level it has hopefully been shown that the discipline of schools and their policies are dubious measures by which to understand the functioning of power and knowledge in schools. Raby (2010) notes that it is in the connections between policies and teacher practice that disciplinary power becomes most apparent and where violence represents a systemic educational problem for both teachers and learners.

A further policy challenge is that teachers are not properly trained to address the needs and support that they need to deal with indiscipline in classrooms. Few teacher participants indicated ongoing professional development in the sphere of managing learner behaviour. Such prevalence of continuing professional development programmes for discipline and classroom management would greatly assist teachers in difficult contexts to explore new disciplinary techniques.

Teachers in the study noted that achieving a consistent and effective disciplinary apparatus in their schools was especially important for the remote areas in which they live, because it is in these areas where immediate additional support and future official presence are unlikely. In that respect, a key policy recommendation is to make professional development programmes available in rural areas in order to equip teachers, especially if these approaches and tools are geared towards improving their disciplinary practices, to avoid abuse and build communities of practice with their colleagues. It was found in this study for schools in Butterworth that disciplinary practices are unworkable when they do not flexibly address the local concerns and customs that inform teacher conduct, and tailor them for the specific disciplinary contexts of those areas.

#### **7.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

The identification of discipline as a core ongoing social problem in schools is unsurprising (Rossouw, 2003; Maphosa & Shumba, 2010). With violence such a pervasive aspect of everyday life in South Africa – whether as intimate and shocking attacks on individuals or as calculated slaughters like Marikana – it is little wonder that schools struggle with constant and regular indiscipline. What constitutes violence is always mediated by an expressed dichotomy between what is legitimate and illegitimate and what is permissible and sanctioned, and thus depending on the moral angle used, indiscipline in class is fluid and subject to the context and rules of where it takes place.

What is noteworthy is how discipline was negotiated at a discursive level by teachers in interlocking relationships of power and knowledge in the three schools of the Eastern Cape. Teachers' description of their distrust of new disciplinary methodologies were often accompanied by their political ideologies and belief systems, which caused great consternation and division amongst staff members because what it amounted to was not what was best for the learners and their future needs, or whether they subscribed to a disciplinary ethos that heralded human rights, but rather depended on the allegiance or non-allegiance of different

teachers to political parties. And yet, when asked directly, teachers more often than not stated that they distrusted the government because of a lack of improvement in the circumstances in which they teach, and the social realities that their learners are daily confronted by. This study has sought to argue that discipline and power within schools are political.

How might violence and discipline operate politically in democratic South Africa, some may ask. For this study, it was argued that everyday violence is always hidden in plain sight, whether in the intermittent city expanses of urban schools or the bland and sparse environments of rural schools in the middle of nowhere (such as Butterworth). Everyday violence and little acts of indiscipline and transgression are bound up in what Foucault (1977) refers to as the constant “tyrannies of reason” and the “banalities of suffering” in marginalised spaces. Looking for and attempting to determine the root causes of violence, or looking for some foundational ‘truths’ with which to make sense of violence, are thus political acts of power that seek to give dominant groups control over the vulnerable. This issue is the essence of what is argued in this thesis.

Under apartheid, physical punishment was the order of the day and teachers were encouraged to use force to submit learners to their will. This was recognised by the post-1994 government as dehumanising and as severing the bonds of trust between teacher and learner. The subsequent paradigm shift that led to the banning of corporal punishment as an endorsed disciplinary method then represented a significant shift in South African schools, especially for teachers who themselves had been subjected to such practices.

The persistence of physical punishment in contemporary school practices marks a serious conceptual challenge. Why do teachers still revert to these practices and what do they achieve through its use? Is it socialised behaviour, or is the role of physical punishment seen as a bigger part of human identity than is generally admitted? (Sayed *et al.*, 2016). Why is physical punishment regarded as the main instrument by which to achieve order, obedience, discipline, and agreeability? Does it inculcate self-control to the extent that is claimed, or is physical punishment a blunt instrument that is meant to simply inscribe the spectacle thereof, and to illustrate the performance of the mundane?

This study posits that physical punishment or disciplinary practices must be seen for what it is: the expression of political power and the need for control over errant bodies that have not been properly normalised to the dictates of “mundane and dehumanised lives” (Rabinow, 1984). Deviance is a form of resistance or refusal to submit to the silencing effects of the school disciplinary machinery. Teachers postulated in the study that new disciplinary regimes simply

open up further spaces for more deviance, making it impossible for teachers to find decisive methods to bring learners under control. Their responses revealed a view of school disciplinary apparatuses that have been infiltrated by a host of political and social concerns that destabilise authentic lines of authority and control, and that desperately need to be reconfigured.

In order to resolve the problem of discipline at the school level, this thesis asserts, the relationships between discipline and ill-discipline, forms of violence and inequality and alienation need to be unpacked more clearly. Social ills contribute to the problems learners bring into schools, and disciplinary techniques that ignore the lived realities of learners only further exacerbate the woes of teachers.

Caution is needed, however, not to pathologise the bleakness and despair associated with life in the rural Eastern Cape. Indiscipline in schools must not be attributed solely to difficult home conditions and poverty-related restrictions. That would be a conceptual mistake. Rather, if discipline is understood as a political act, then it is possible to address the violence that they experience on a daily basis in ways that incorporate the contextual needs of the school, the classroom, the individual learner, and the teacher, and make these responsive to an adaptable and responsive human rights disciplinary praxis.

## **7.5 FURTHER RESEARCH**

This research honed in on the relationship between discipline, power, and knowledge in schools in the rural Eastern Cape. Notably, the initial inquiry did not regard gender as a concern in thinking about violence, discipline and power. Yet, in the study teachers in Butterworth regularly pointed to issues of gender and violence against women as an ever-present concern in their schools and communities. This constitutes an issue of positionality and bias tied to the researcher's maleness.

It was found that the issue of gender operated at a number of levels in the study. In the first place, teaching is often regarded as a feminine profession (Sayed *et al.*, 2016), with high numbers of women annually entering the teaching force, often in the lower phases and grades. This is often explained in relation to the affective natures of teachers as mothers and female, and their 'natural desire' to protect learners and shield them from the harsh outside world. Modern, young teachers, like Chichi (Zamokuhle), at the three schools in rural Eastern Cape constantly spoke about their professional manner in relation to care and respect for learners.



In the second place, masculinity remains a persistent challenge in local communities and invariably leads to many patriarchal male attitudes infiltrating schools on a daily basis. As Godenzi, Schwartz and Dekeseredy (2001) note, “males and females continuously do gender”, with “performances” or “manifestations” of masculinity in schools evident in the local culture fights between initiates and non-initiates and the preference of male teachers for physical sanction. In schools, teachers observed that girls were especially expected to toe the line in their conduct, while boys were assumed to be natural troublemakers (Mohapi, 2014).

In this study it seemed evident that the powerful representation of masculinity in the form of male teachers was what sealed the bonds between male authority figures and ‘pliant’ boys and that problematic gender ideologies often took root in the disciplinary practices of schools that did not recognise its gender bias (Godenzi *et al.*, 2001).

Patriarchy in school communities is an important research area because it provides a more incisive lens to view discipline and its purpose within modern state schools, and highlights the socialisation dimensions of disciplinary practices within schools. A broadened field of inquiry for future research of discipline offers greater opportunity to understand the intricacies of school disciplinary praxis.

## 7.6 CONCLUSION

Issues of discipline and social order are theoretical and philosophical concerns in education mainly because learners are social beings who are at one and the same time individuals and part of broader communities. Learners may inhabit separate bodies, have their own experiences, feelings, and ambitions, but they do not operate independently from the dictates of the societies in which they live. They need social contact to remain physically and emotionally healthy, and they also need decent levels of cooperation and coordination with others to learn, and to lead orderly lives. Accordingly, as noted in the literature, learners are expected to have certain stable expectations about their and others’ behaviour, and need to commit to work together with others towards the same social and educational ends (Hechter & Horne, 2003:285). What this means is that school structures and procedures that focus on discipline are invariably locked in battle over dominant forms of power and knowledge in schools.

Any study of discipline, power, and knowledge thus involves school processes that remain deeply sociological and conceptual dilemmas, given that the coordination and cooperation required for effective discipline involve making a number of normative assumptions about

human nature and about individual motivation. These are political debates and decisions that position concerns about social disorder in ways that privilege access to quality education and care for some, and not for others.

For this thesis, the research findings teased out a number of social issues that bind learners, schools, and teachers in particular ways in the three Eastern Cape schools (particularly those issues that are seen to particularly jeopardise *order* in rural cultural contexts), and that do so through the disciplinary lens of physical sanction. The implications for education policy are immense. Unless discipline is recognised as a deliberate act of power, current attempts to generate usable disciplinary mechanisms and processes within schools (especially rural schools that are caught up in other issues tied to local culture) will result in the production once again of even more ‘blunt instruments’.

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